

LOVING WITHOUT LIMITS

“RECONSTRUCTING REDEMPTIVE RELATIONSHIPS”

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Statement of Purpose

The current dissertation draws from the theological perspective that God is Love (1 John 4:7-8, King James Version). It also outlines the practical implications of God loving the world (John 3:16-17) to inform a life that encapsulates authentic personhood and a lifestyle that leads to the reconstruction of redemptive relationships. The thesis begins with the reconstruction of the concept of love and redefines the art of loving in the framework of human interactions. In addition, the paper argues that love is a lifestyle of commitment that is grounded in a relationship with God, is one-directional and sacrificial in expression, yet satisfying in experience. The thesis seeks further to contend that “unconditional commitment” is much more representative of agape love than “unconditional acceptance”, although the latter is more commonly used. The content of this thesis is an amalgamation of a series of workshops entitled, “Love Without Limits.”

Agape love will be the primary focus of this dissertation as distinguished from other expressions of loving based on biblical categorization. Other categorizations as “phileo” and “eros” will be noted as other aspects of the art of loving and will be identified as such. This thesis will focus on deconstructing the notion of agape love in reference to the concept of divinity. Defined primarily from a human perspective, agape is existentially subjective in conceptualization. Attempts will be made to reconstruct an understanding of agape love that incorporates the notion of love as an intrinsic attribute of divinity. Agape love is posited as an eternal expression of divine attributes that is experienced as an existential reality and enacted as an eternal moment in time.

The notion that agape love is enacted as ‘an eternal moment in time’ bears the thought that it is an act of the divine, eternal God; experienced and expressed through the limitations of temporal human beings. In such an act of loving, eternity bears upon time the burden of coaching the infinite within the embrace of the finite and the supernatural within the scope of the natural. In

the mandate to love then, divinity, therefore, dictates what man is hapless to perform and eternity defines within limits, what man is destined to enact: love.

The questions will be discussed regarding agape love; Is it *unconditional acceptance* or could it be much more substantially reframed as *unconditional commitment*? Is it made evident by what it receives or by what it gives? Is reciprocity a necessity in the experience and expression of love or is it an existential reality, one-directional in its expression, though three-dimensional in its scope? Throughout this thesis, the term “love” will be used as a reference to “agape love” except when otherwise noted. The King James version of the Bible will be the main version used in the current paper.

As stated, this thesis seeks to deconstruct the denotation of love as unconditional acceptance and to reconstruct the concept of love as unconditional commitment. From the theological perspective that God is love (1 John 4:7-8), it presents the position that God is the source of love; love comes from God and love is God expressing Himself, revealing his personality and attributes. Reflected in the thoughts of Paul Tillich (1952), God is the ground of being and as such, is the source of all existence. This dissertation proposes that when God loves, God loves with everything that God possesses, and loves preemptively and purposefully. In addition, the paper propositions that the purpose of love is to orchestrate a relationship that is redemptive in nature and restorative in its outcome.

Another goal of this thesis is to understand human relationship in the light of God’s love. The paper highlights love’s transcendence, transformative and redemptive processes, and identifies human filters that often mitigate the purity and power of that love in human experience and expression. Beyond the theological constructs, this thesis seeks to explore practical insight in understanding the nature, nurturance, nuances, needs, necessity, nobility, and nexus of love as one-

directional and culminate by exploring the three dimensions of loving: upward, inward and outward. These dimensions are reflected in loving God with heart, soul, and mind and loving one's neighbor as oneself. A case study will be incorporated in the text to exemplify various practical applications.

Love has often been defined as unconditional acceptance; however, in a world of changing values of a relativistic mindset, such representation can be misleading. Unconditional acceptance posits the notion that one will acknowledge and accept a person without prejudice or judgment regardless of the condition that the person is in. Beyond acknowledgment, and with regards to the recognition of the person's existence is the thought of acceptance. Acceptance here is viewed as the act of being incorporated into a conjugal relationship. A concept that apparently, includes the notions of affirmation, autonomy, absolute worth and accurate empathy (Miller & Rollnick, 2013). The thesis will argue that the notion of acceptance should be considered much more than an initial acknowledgment that is based on mere acquaintance.

It will be further argued that unconditional love as presented in the doctrine of soteriology, in its practical sense, begins with the notion of transformation. The prerequisite for such transformation is the sacrifice made in Christ. Christ was slain before the foundation of the world, thereby, presenting a solution-focused approach to the process of salvation. Deduced from scripture that purports "we love him because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19, King James Version), God is seen as initiating the process of acceptance. However, that acceptance is preceded by the ransom that is paid for the redemption of humankind and the resumption of a relationship with God. In scripture, a life transformation seems to precede the act of acceptance.

With the notion that the creation of humankind was an act of love and in redemption, human transformation precedes divine acceptance, could agape love then be understood as

unconditional commitment? Unconditional commitment is intrinsically self-motivating. It implies an externalizing of life's resources to engage a person or subject with a view of redemption and reconciliation. God loved first, and the act of creation is an act of self-motivated love.

Existential issues within the context of human relationships will be considered. No moral being unconditionally accepts, without prejudice, that which is considered opposite to its own nature. The morally-inclined individual desires that the evil be transformed into good and the unpleasant into a measure of acceptability. This is the practice of the moral and the ethical, and human beings are by nature moral creatures and agents of ethics. Morality implies ethical judgment, and judgment is prejudiced by ethical standards. Mercy, however, is virtuous and vicarious. Love embraces both the punitive tendencies of judgment and the altruistic penal tenets of mercy.

This thesis proposes the reconstruction of redemptive relationships as a legacy of love, with the notion to devotedly commit oneself to the betterment of one's neighbors as one does for oneself. It is in living and giving in a godlike manner that love finds existential reality and true expression. The truest expression of love is in the ultimate sacrifice of life when that life is lived for God in its service to others. As an attribute of God, love is eternal in its scope, temporal in its service, relational in focus, and redemptive in purpose. Love redeems reconstructively.

It is, therefore, hypothesized that love is God expressing Himself and loving is living in a godlike manner, with a consciousness of God that is evident through life's expressions informed by the conviction of God's words. Loving is, therefore, paradoxical; it is in giving that it receives. In its human vehicle, love requires that divine and infinite expressions be mitigated through finite earthly experiences. In this too, it is paradoxical as these experiences necessitate that God's love

with all its aspects of divinity be experienced and expressed within the consciousness of humanity with all its limitations. Humanity was crafted in God's image and likeness (Genesis 1:26).

Created in God's image and likeness and subsequently restored to that image, sin infects the human psyche with consequences that inhibit the purity of one's expression. As a result of sin, love is tainted both by one's capacity to receive and give, to communicate and to commune, to speak and to listen, in its attempt to harmonize lives in endearing relationships.

Language as a unique mode of expression appears critical in any form of communication. A common language must be utilized to facilitate comprehension. Two questions are necessary and essential. First, how is love divinely communicated? Second, in what way is love humanly understood? From the divine prospective, the language of love follows the path of an intrinsic interest of the divine initiative without outside influence. And within the human life, the logistics of loving is realized subjectively in human interaction as an experience of that divine initiative.

It will be contended that love is first and foremost a divine initiative. Since, theologically, nothing precedes God, to assert that God first loved puts love in the category of a divine initiative. And even then, the human vessel is first and foremost a recipient before becoming a participant in the expression of a love that God initiates. Love is intrinsically relational in its outcome.

Love existed within the confines, or, in other words, the context of the Trinity as an intrinsic and intrapersonal interest. The term "intrinsic" describing the divine initiative embraces the idea of love being an inherent, essential, fundamental essence of the Trinity in harmony. It is God embracing Trinity in perfect harmony and unity. Love has no authentic existence outside of the divine Trinity; it is rather inherent in the Trinity in unity, as a core attribute of that God Being. Love, however, stands as a divine initiative of unconditional commitment, one-directional in its

expression and all-inclusive in its experience. As a divine initiative, it needs neither hope nor faith; it establishes itself as a decisive act initiated from within the contents of the divine Trinity.

It is also necessary to raise the question as to how this divine love is expressed and realized within the context of human existence. In this context, love is, however, more a manifestation of being than a sentiment of emotional identification. Love is ultimately expressed in the person and propitiation of Jesus Christ. It takes on the canopy of flesh and blood and presents itself through a human form. Still, there is the question concerning the act of loving from that divine expression: How does the “unknown” makes Himself known? With thoughts higher than human thoughts and ways higher than human ways (Isaiah 55:9), how does the infinite and eternal love confine itself into the consciousness of the finite human mind? Two concepts are evident in the understanding of such divinity to the human transmission: 1) Revelation as it relates to God’s active self-disclosure; and 2) Realization as it refers to human acknowledgment.

Revelation through incarnation will be presented as a reality, not only as the expression of God’s love towards humanity but also as a human encounter in experiencing the love of God. It is critical that God in Christ is both God and man, the God-man. It is further argued that if he were not man, he could not identify with the plight of humanity, and if he were not God, he could not help humanity out of its misery. Therefore, it is in the God-man that love is most powerfully expressed and experienced.

It will be noted that this mandate to love God with all heart, soul, and mind appears existentially impossible without the help of God Himself. It will be contended that love is expressed as attributes, filtering through the contents of the human heart, enabling the human will to love self subjectively while loving others objectively. It is then in the expression of that act of love that human beings most evidently reflect God: God in all and through all.

In the context of human relationships towards God and each other, love is revealed to humanity in the authenticity of the incarnation, and thereby realized in the act of that ultimate sacrifice. Through the process of that divine revelation and human realization, love is existentially experienced. However, it is in its operation in the human sphere that love is greatly challenged both by the capability and ability of the human will to grasp it.

The logistics of loving will be discussed positing love as human expressions that follow experiencing the divine love. Love is frequently questioned when humanly expressed. Words should express ideas, not originate them (Tozer, 1961) and ideas should represent design not replace them. In the contents of the human heart and within the context of human relationship, love is most tested for its validity and authenticity. Both the lover and the beloved are challenged by the consciousness of their own experiences dictating their perceptions, and the condition of their circumstances to determine their reception of the love that is acknowledged. It will be noted that in discussing the logistics, the content must be relevant to the context in the search for viability.

External expressions as it relates to love may be inadvertently acknowledged in varied ways by individuals in different settings. The complications of loving and the acknowledgment of being loved are rooted in the art of communication. Effective communication, requiring both the act of speaking (verbal and non-verbal) and the art of listening (active and presumptive), is a skill that needs to be developed in the art of loving.

The point of the arguments will be to discuss how love revolutionizes the human life. It has been noted that love, in its highest and purest expression requires an encounter with God. God being the originator and initiator of love in its noblest form influences the human heart, thereby, imparting love through the agency of the Holy Spirit. An encounter with God through the Holy Spirit and the revealing of love through the incarnation of Christ facilitate the human ability to

encounter divine love. However, love divinely expressed, and love humanly experienced leaves much to be desired. The purity and magnitude of divine love as expressed through the gospel, with all the attributes of God influencing its expression, lack the same characteristics when experienced within the frail and finite human condition.

The divine attributes, influencing and informing divine loving, render the experience of divine love "foolishness to the Greek and a stumbling block to the Jews" (1 Corinthians 1:23). Such an expression of love, pure in its form, surpasses the scope of human intelligence. The thrust of the gospel is its message of love; the good news that God loved, and God gave, and through the sacrificial death where redemption is possible, love is made evident. The message of the gospel itself presents the challenge both in conceptualizing God and in comprehending the act of loving. The existential gap that exists between divinity and humanity renders it theoretically and practically impossible to conceptualize the love of God. And, as Lewis, Armini, & Lannon (2000) has postulated, there is a semblance of Gift-love humanly expressed, however, that reflection inadvertently becomes demonic if not surrendered in a relationship with God.

It is further understood that both experiences and expressions of love vary within the human context. One wonders whether the human being could ever rise to the level of unconditional commitment without the attainment of holiness. Holiness decontaminates the self-centeredness occasioned by sin. Holiness leaves one to question whether pure and authentic love can be conceptualized within the context of the human condition. And, if contextualized, what effect does the human condition have on one's perception of that love? It is a question of contextualization.

In discussing contextualization, regarding the issue of relevance, it will be noted that revelation must be contextualized within the confines of the human situation to be authenticated. And, it is in this contextualization that the message becomes significant and meaningful to the

human mind. However, it is also in the attempt at contextualization that both the definition and description of love become varied. One of the most defining concerns is in the idea of conceptualizing love first as an unconditional commitment that finds fulfillment in unconditional acceptance.

Loving, from the divine perspective, and as an act that originates from the core of the divine nature, existed before the creation of humankind. In the light of the attributes of infinity and eternity, one could postulate that within the context of the divine, love existed in making the persons of the Trinity, both the subject and object of love. Until the creation of other beings, love was confined within the context of the Godhead. Beyond the existence of God, what need is there for an act of acceptance of that humanity, that had not yet existed? However, in the act of creating, God moves beyond the Godhead to bring into being an external world to which God remains committed. Before creation, there is only the commitment to create. It was then, when the creation was made actual that the sentiment of acceptance is voiced in the expression, "it is good" (Genesis 1:18). The commitment to create precedes the acceptance of that which is created.

A distinction between the two, commitment and acceptance, seems necessary. Commitment carries the notion of a subject's caring actions towards an object with no expectation or requirement of a response from the object to indicate acceptance. In the light of such commitment the object hears the message, "you can count on me." When commitment is evident, the condition of the object does not determine whether the attitude of care is exercised; though, it does influence how the care is administered. In the same light, regardless of the fall and corruption of humankind, the gospel reveals the commitment of God to redeem and restore humanity to God's likeness. The condition of the human being does not determine whether God loves or not, but rather that condition determines how God loves, as in the person of Christ. Love is a divine

initiative and, as such, begins as a commitment to create, and then to appreciate. Acceptance, on the other hand, implies an act of the subject in consideration of an existing object. In other words, the object influences the subject's activities. Whereas commitment carries the notion of externalizing thrust, acceptance has the notion of an internalized trust. In the act of redemption, the notion of acceptance is combined with the notion of regeneration, restoration and ultimate reconstruction to the likeness of God. If the pages of scripture are to be noted, such acceptance seems conditional; conditioned on the cleansing of sins and the walking in the newness of life. A change in the human being seems to precede restoration into the family of God and the ultimate entrance into the kingdom of God. Commitments seem unconditional, needing only the thrust of the subject towards the object and could be enacted even before the creation of that object as is evident in the very act of creation. Acceptance requires the existence of an object of focus.

One could argue that love, when defined through the lens of sin, sees acceptance as its primary distinctiveness. However, when love is viewed from the perspective of holiness the concept of commitment becomes the delineating factor. One could further argue that when love is contextualized and so defined, the nature of its contents is influenced by its context. To say that love is unconditional commitment is to note that God in love acted out on his own in creating and then in caring. To say that love is unconditional commitment is to note that God remains faithful in seeking the well-being of humanity regardless of the sinful condition of the human nature. To say that love is unconditional commitment is to note that the situation of the human being does not determine whether God loves or not; God's love remains consistent in his actions towards human beings. To say that love is unconditional commitment is to note that God's primary concern in the gospel is the restoration of humanity and addressing the sin problem is only one aspect of salvation. It can also be noted that God is more concerned about restoration of the soul than God is of its

condemnation: There is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit (Romans 8:1).

Love is of God. It is pure to the extent that it is influenced by the magnitude of God's attributes. The human being, by itself, possessed neither the capacity nor the ability to experience and express such love in its purest form. This expression of pure love among humans requires both the agency and activity of God to facilitate the expression of that love within the realm of human interaction. To the extent that the human being becomes the conduit and channel of such love, it is to that extent that the human being is godlike. Love is God expressing himself through the avenue of human interaction, towards God and towards each other.

The act of loving, however, as a theory and practice, will be noted as having degrees of distinctions and determined dimension. Human personality types serve as peculiar idiosyncrasies and dispositional traits that act as filters. Personality types do influence one's perception of the divine love as it is experienced and expressed existentially within the context of human interaction. While educating couples on personality types, it has been noted that much of the conflicts arise from the dispositional preference of one personality against the other. The nature of the conflict stems from the trait of one personality type, such as the introvert, finding itself violated by the intrusion of the outgoing extrovert. It can be said that most times the source of the conflict was not the act of the extrovert as the extrovert was being its natural self. However, the introvert finds itself offended by the activities of the extrovert when solitude was what the introvert sought. Of the four pairs of personality traits, extroversion/introversion, sensing/intuition, thinking/feeling, judging/perceiving, each carries peculiar expectations that serve as filters through which the individual receives, processes, and expresses sentiments of love.

Each stage of development from birth to adulthood has its own challenges, and as indicated by developmental theories, there are expectations to be met at every stage. The interplay of the individual with its environment, whether intentional or accidental, assists in the development of schemas that inform perceptions and determine actions. Drawing from the work of Glasser, founder of Reality Therapy, Powell (1974) articulated his summation with these notable words, “Our interpersonal problems begin with intrapersonal conflicts” (Powell, 1974, p.22).

It has been highlighted in an article entitled, *The Facts on Children and Domestic Violence* (2008) that growing up in a violent home could be a terrifying and traumatic experience affecting every aspect of a child’s life, and development. The following were noted statistics:

- 15.5 million U.S. children live in families in which partner violence occurred at least once in the past year, and seven million children live in families in which severe partner violence occurred;
- In a single day in 2007, 13,485 children were living in a domestic violence shelter or transitional housing facility. Another 5,526 sought services at a non-residential program;
- A Michigan study of low-income preschoolers found that children who have been exposed to family violence suffer symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, such as bed-wetting or nightmares, and are at greater risk than their peers of having allergies, asthma, gastrointestinal problems, headaches, and flu;
- Children of mothers who experience prenatal physical domestic violence are at an increased risk of exhibiting aggressive, anxious, depressed or hyperactive behavior;

- Females who are exposed to their parents' domestic violence as adolescents are significantly more likely to become victims of dating violence than daughters of nonviolent parents;
 - Children who experience childhood trauma, including witnessing incidents of domestic violence, are at a greater risk of having serious adult health problems including tobacco use, substance abuse, obesity, cancer, heart disease, depression, and a higher risk for unintended pregnancy; and
 - Physical abuse during childhood increases the risk of future victimization among women and the risk of future perpetration of abuse by men more than two-fold.
- (*Futures Without Violence*, 2008, pp.1-2).

With these statistics, one wonders what the outcome of children exposed to violence would be like. The challenge of raising a human being in a world filled with counter-productive alternatives with racial and cultural idiosyncrasies becomes a formidable task. From the absent father to the committed mother, what effect does love (or its absence) has on the developing individual? Is love necessary? And if it is, what makes love necessary? In answering these questions, a wide variety of responses is not needed as research has shown the dramatic and adverse effects of a life without love. Scripture teaches that “love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8) and with this, it presents love as a necessary act in its ability to address the broken and dysfunctional. In the year 1971, in his book entitled, *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, Maslow (1971) wrote of the polarizing dysfunction of humanity by stating:

All the evidence that we have... indicates that it is reasonable to assume in practically every human being, and certainly in almost every newborn baby, that there is an active

will towards health, an impulse towards growth, or towards the actualization of human potentialities. But at once we are confronted with the very saddening realization that, so few people make it. Only a small proportion of the human population gets to the point of identity, or of selfhood, full humanness self-actualization (p.24).

Unconditional love is a powerful influence with a formidable impact on the lives of individuals. The statistics noted in an article entitled, *The Fatherless Generation* (2010), regarding children raised in fatherless homes are very insightful regarding the impact of the lack of fathers in the home.

- 63% of youth suicides are from fatherless homes (US Dept. Of Health/Census) – 5 times the average.
- 90% of all homeless and runaway children are from fatherless homes – 32 times the average.
- 85% of all children who show behavior disorders come from fatherless homes – 20 times the average. (Center for Disease Control)
- 80% of rapists with anger problems come from fatherless homes –14 times the average. (Justice & Behavior, Vol 14, p. 403-26)
- 71% of all high school dropouts come from fatherless homes – 9 times the average. (National Principals Association Report)

The data above could also be translated to (*The Fatherless Generation*, 2010):

- Fatherless children are twice as likely to drop out of school.
- Children with Fathers who are involved are 40% less likely to repeat a grade in school.
- Children with Fathers who are involved are 70% less likely to drop out of school.
- Children with Fathers who are involved are more likely to get A's in school.

- Children with Fathers who are involved are more likely to enjoy school and engage in extracurricular activities.
- 75% of all adolescent patients in chemical abuse centers come from fatherless homes – 10 times the average.

This thesis intends to contend, however, where “mercy triumphs over judgment,” the loving individual could be unconditionally committed to making the life of another person significant and meaningful regardless of the condition that the person is in. That is, indeed, the thrust and scope of God’s mercy. So too is it of God’s love, before man reciprocates, God is committed to the betterment of humankind, providing the resources necessary to the redemption of all individuals. Regardless of the condition of a human being, it is of the nature of God to be committed to the process of reconstructing redemptive relationships. The term reconstructing is used here as the outcome of salvation, as an experience of being born again and restored to the redeemed image of God-likeness: a pattern positioned in Jesus Christ. The process of the reconstruction is the acknowledgment of the fact that the unredeemed is estranged with a death-dealing distancing necessitating new life and rebirth. The past, present, and future are intricately linked, and the knowledge of the past precipitates an unknown future while life is being lived in a conflictual present. Reconstructing redemptive relationships presupposes a transformation of life that sets the groundwork for a promising future. It is a movement from the known pessimism to the promise of an unknown optimism.

Loving incorporates both the idea of embracing the known and engaging the unknown. As such, it implies recognizing the unchangeable past, relating to the present changing realities and repositioning oneself for future possibilities. Change is inherently conflictual and inevitable; and life is an experience of constant change. The tendency of the human mind is to move away from

objects of conflict. It is not natural and normal for the human mind to embrace that which is contrary to its orientation. Like light dispelling darkness, the holiness of God implies purity without sin. However, regardless of our sinful past and the deprived or degenerate condition that one is in, God is fully and unconditionally committed to redeem, restore and reconcile the human being to Himself. Since the path of the sinful life is consequently paved with elements of death, there is the prophetic notion that the future and the present are symbiotically linked. Sin leads to death. However, in the process of salvation, eternity bears upon a time a life-changing moment of redemption and reconciliation. As such a change is realized, the prospect of the future is altered.

Love alters life. It imports a dedication that is devotedly committed to expressing oneself fully in the process of growth and development regardless of the condition of the one being loved. Love is expressed as an unconditional commitment that is foundational to unconditional acceptance. God loved, God gave, that we might believe and become beings conscious of a redeemed life. God engages, guided by the purpose of bringing the human to an acceptable end.

At the first human-divine contact in time and some measure in the realm of eternity, before time, God made provision for redemption in the Lamb slain before the foundation of the world. It could be argued that the notion of redemption preceded the actual creation of humans and the subsequent sinful condition. God created the human being as an act of love before the actualization of sin in the realm of human existence. In the Genesis account of creation when God created and saw that it was good, creation was an act of love, as God acts only in harmony with His nature. God is love. Love created humankind and love existed as a motivating attribute before sin was destructively present in the human life. Creation was an act of love; a commitment to love. Sin came into being in the realm of human existence, yet the commitment of love that once created now resonates in the scheme of salvation through Jesus Christ. Love that once served as a

motivating agent of creation now serves as a restorative agent of salvation.

One could further reason that the divine initiative to create human beings of free will speaks to the very nature of love. Initiating the creation of free moral agents, love presupposes individuation with the possibility of stoic independence or symbiotic interdependence. The free agent is allowed the right of choice with each choice subjectively determined. With free will, such choosing could be impacted and influenced by external factors but by implication, must be inherently determined. That inherent determination makes the choices of the free moral agents a one-directional preposition. Love flows from the subject towards the object of consideration but remains the innate expression of the subject entirely, though, at times, is influenced by external factors. The exercise of the free will is one-directional and independent in its expression. However, it could be interdependent in its intent and extent. So too is love. It can be implied that love is “one-directional” in its expression. Its existence in God and its subsequent expression towards humankind are not dependent on the condition of God being loved but rather on God’s ability and capacity to love. In the act of loving, the condition of the object being loved may inform the act of love regarding its relevant, but that same condition does not determine the nature of love’s expression. How love is experienced is subjectively contextual; love when expressed is entirely intrinsically driven. God’s love does not require reciprocity to be authenticated. It exists independently and is an expression of God’s own will. It is not coerced but freely given, not influenced but freely expressed, and sometimes, though not reciprocated by humans, is forever evident.

The human experience and expression of love are determined to a great extent by having an existential relationship with God. Invariable, love exists within God, is experienced by humans, and is expressed to others in the relationships of life. This love and its expression are like a

“treasure in earthen vessels that the excellence of the power is of God and not of us” (2 Corinthians 4:7).

Love is always one-directional. It finds satisfaction in the existential expression of itself not merely in the reciprocity of experience. “We love him because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). In this vein of thought, it could also be said that love is sacrificial in its expression. Love finds satisfaction in giving sacrificially and gives with the goal of bringing another a promise of an acceptable end. Love’s satisfaction is experienced in the act itself; the act of giving of itself. Divine love is sacrificial and unconditional commitment. However, human love seeks reciprocity, not as a deficit need, but rather as an essential aspect of being authentically human. It is that sense of authenticity characterized by the mutual commitment that constitutes the reciprocity towards unconditional acceptance.

Informed by the thought of an unconditional commitment, Lewis (1960) warns that “if all we mean by our love is a craving to be loved, we are in a very deplorable state...If we only mean this craving, we are mistaking love for something that is not love at all” (p.2). There could be no human authenticity without love and no validity without reciprocal love. Often in the realm of human relationships, love is determined by a subjective desire that dictates the value of another’s worth. Love then is not so much a subjective craving to receive, as characterized by fulfilling deficit needs, but it is a subjective unconditional inclination to give. Furthermore, in giving, love is both actualized and realized; actualized as an expression of God and realized as an experience of man.

One may think that with the passing of time love often dissipates and the intensity with which it pursues reciprocity dwindles to a trifling memory of a once infatuating moment. It could be contended that the attempt to engage in a significant relationship is merely a misguided effort

influenced by the search of wandering emotions desperate for companionship. It could be argued further that love dies swiftly where reciprocity is wanting, and that one cannot love where loving seems sacrificial. However, if love is of God, creative and redemptive, one could, and would not love less when God is the source of the love that is experienced and the love that is being expressed.

This thesis proposes the reconstruction of redemptive relationships as a legacy of love, with the notion to devotedly commit oneself to the betterment of one's neighbors as one does for oneself. It is in living and giving in a godlike manner that love finds existential reality and true expression. The truest expression of love is in the ultimate sacrifice of life when that life is lived for God in its service to others. As an attribute of God, love is eternal in its scope, temporal in its service; relational in focus and redemptive in purpose.

It is therefore hypothesized that love is essentially God revealing Himself through the medium of expressive attributes and that loving is living in a godlike manner, with a consciousness of Godlike attributes evident through life's expressions inspired by communion with God and informed by the conviction of God's words. Loving is therefore paradoxical; it is in giving that it receives. In its human vehicle, love requires that divine and infinite expression be mitigated through finite earthly experiences. It is paradoxical as it requires the love that comes from God with all aspects of divinity be experienced and expressed within the consciousness of the human mind, with all its limitations.

Biblical Theology

John 3:16 is the focus of this thesis. It will serve as an outline for the paper's content. Its statements will be theoretically explored to reveal the redemptive aspect of love both from a descriptive and prescriptive perspective. As God is love, love will be understood as a self-

disclosed divine revelation; manifesting both God's power and personhood. The King James Version of the Bible will be the primary text unless otherwise noted.

Highlighting Biblical and theological constructs, this thesis seeks to explore practical insight in understanding the nature, nurturance, nuances, needs, necessity, nobility, and nexus of love. It further highlights three dimensions of loving, the upward, inward and outward dimensions, as to reflect the mandate of loving God with heart, soul, and mind and loving one's neighbor as oneself. It also submits love as one-directional in expression, though three-dimensional in scope.

A theology of God is essentially a theology of love. The very concept of the Trinity implies an existence intricately interwoven in mutual harmony. To deny the plurality of the persons of the Godhead is to deny the essence of the Trinity. However, to affirm the three persons of the Godhead as existentially "Trinity in Unity" is to confirm a relationship exemplifying and giving evidence to the nature of love and the essential union of the divine.

The concept of the divine existence as "Trinity in Unity" is the embodiment of divine love in its ultimate form. Love unifies the persons of the Godhead. It is the "perfect bond of unity" (Colossians 3:14). It does not exist as a separate entity but as an integral attribute of the Godhead. Love exists as the unifying bond in the maintenance of that divine union. Its expression towards humankind proposes an outcome of a union in reconciliation to God. As exemplified in the Godhead Trinity, love is intrinsically centripetal in its outcome as it seeks to sustain harmony and unity among objects. Noting this then, it also leaves one to propose that any act of God, as Trinity, is an act of love and any act of any person of the Godhead, being in perfect harmony, is indeed an act of love. All God's attributes work in perfect harmony in all that God does. And, if all that God does, involves all that God is, operating in harmony, then all that God does is indeed love in action. Love is that unifying attribute of the Godhead manifested in functional unity.

In creation God disclosed his love in revealing his image and likeness. In redemption, God reveals the source and scope of that love. It is ironic how sin is exposed in love as both a tragedy and a trajectory. A tragedy in the sense that sin defiles that which was once made pure; and a trajectory in that it gives insight into the very nature of God's love. Love is cognizant of the travesty of sin and withholds immediate consequence to that sin while unfolding salvation's plan in the gospel of redemption. The transformation that salvation initiates is the result of the love that God has lavished towards humanity (1 John 3:1).

Scripture has noted that it is in the incarnation that God's love is most profoundly manifested (1 John 4: 9). Love is evidently expressed by the sending of God's son, and as is noted that in loving one another "God dwells in us and his love is made perfect in us" (1 John 4:12). Lewis (2000), in speaking of love, argued that man could not truly love without the help of God. Therefore, it is in submission to God that man finds his ability to love.

Love is as complex as it is simple, as theoretical as it is practical, as mystical as it is mysterious. It is foundational to human relations yet functionally; it is complex in its application.

The Nature of Love - "For God"

God initiates love: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). This record gives insight into certain aspects of the nature of love as it relates to the knowledge of God. It surveys the dynamics of human interactions and the propensity of its flawed existence. It argues for the reconstruction of the concept of love from the notion of unconditional acceptance to unconditional commitment. It posits love as an act of God fully informed by all the attributes of God. Love is initiated by God in creation and is paradoxical in that it is a divine attribute necessitating human experience and expression. Love originates primarily as a divine virtue.

“Love comes from God and God is love” (1 John 4:7), according to scripture. Love in its purest expression is God expressing Himself informed by all that God is; all the attributes of God. Divine love, as an expression of God’s nature, is thereby influenced and informed by God’s immutability, omniscience, omnipotence, omnipresence, wisdom, faithfulness, goodness, justice, mercy, holiness, and sovereignty. However, as Tozer (1961) warns, to equate love with God is a major mistake as this equalization may lead to the substitution of love for God. In contrast, then, love is presented as God expressing himself. It is not a substitution as to equate love with God but to consider love as God’s full expression of himself with all that God is, influencing all that God does in the act of love. Finding its origin in the very existence of God, love could be existentially defined as God’s self-revelation through the manifold of manifested attributes.

John 3:16 contends that “God so loved the world that he gave his only son.” This statement, “God so loved” speaks volumes to both the subject that is loving and the object that is being loved. As God is the progenitor of such love, it is in essence influenced by the very nature of God. God’s nature, and God in His capacity and ability to love, make such love an act of divine proportion. As previously stated, everything that is God, is present in everything that is of God (Tozer, 1961). God’s love is, therefore, an expression influenced by every attribute of God. It is a divine act of a balanced proportion with all the attributes of God informing His purpose in creation and redemption. All God’s attributes are represented in every act of God.

“For God so loved the world” (John 3:16) is an expression that implies the scope of human comprehension. It is a divine initiative that is grounded in the depths of God’s being and expressed with the harmony of the totality of God’s attributes. God’s loving incorporates His mercy, grace, justice, goodness, omnipotence, omnipresence and omniscience. Everything that God does incorporates everything that God is. The act of loving is consequently not only a divine initiative

but a divine ultimatum as it is exemplified in the gift of his only begotten son, which is an ultimate expression of himself. Love is God extending himself for, in, and through the human life. Love embodies God's totality and is ultimately expressed through the sacrifice in Christ.

God for us – existential idealism. Love, as an essential expression of the divine nature, embraces both the ideas of sacrifice and substitution. God loves with an everlasting love (Jeremiah 31:3), and as such from the dawn of creation to the span of eternity, that love covers the scope of human existence. In the incarnation it becomes an existential idealism.

The idea that God is commending his love towards us (Romans 5:8) is pivotal to the understanding of that divine act. The word "commend" carries the connotation of presenting oneself in such a manner as to attract the attention of the object in question. It is a manifestation that is intended to appeal by its attraction. God so loved, that He gave. That giving is a cognitively challenging proposition as it causes one to question, whether God who has an infinite ability to give also has a corresponding infinite capacity to receive. Or, does the concept of infinity imply the limitless and boundless abundance with no need and therefore no necessity to receive? If the former is embraced, then one is left to assume that God, by the giving of Himself in His son Jesus Christ, has thereby initiated the capacity of being an object of love, the ability to give with the capacity to receive. If the latter is held, then one is left to assume that love is one-directional, always objectified towards the object being loved and never needing validation through reciprocity. Ideally, in the act of loving, it necessitates that one must have both the ability to give and also the capacity to receive without feeling a sense of being coerced or a degree of being inferior. Having needs suggest deficiency. Giving gifts suggest sufficiency. Regarding God, it is understood that in being self-sufficient, there is no deficiency but the ability to give limitlessly. The love of God is never deficient; it flows ceaselessly, eternally; never needing always giving.

Within the context of the Trinity, love is essentially relational as it is unifying. It is in the context of the Trinity in unity. It has been argued that to be holy is to desire one thing (Kierkegaard, 1962). Holiness is essentially singlemindedness. Holiness and wholeness require both purity and unity. Holiness, as a condition of purity, is the consciousness of God impregnating every thought and holiness as a consensus of unity; it is the consciousness of community living impacted by the presence of God. Love inspired by holiness purifies humanity with the consciousness of God while uniting God and humanity into a fellowship of wholeness. As an existential ideal within the context of communal living, love is God expressing Himself within the confines of the human heart, both purifying and uniting. Love is the existential idealism of sacrifice and support,

The commendation of love is evident in the incarnation of Christ. The gift of the only begotten son (John 3:16, 1 John 4:9 &10), as substitute and sacrifice, and as a ransom for the redemption of humanity is an act of love seeking wholeness and oneness.

God in us – experiential reality. There is a sense of validity in the idea that there needs to be a level of subjectivity to validate reality. Love in the human heart is presented as the identifying virtue of discipleship (John 13:35) and the distinguishing characteristics of servanthood (Galatians 5:13). Love is also noted as the trademark of an identity with God (John 13:34; 15:12) and the fountain of purity (1 Peter 1:22). Love being relational in its scope requires the interaction of two living entities. “God so loved the world” (John 3:16) denotes an interaction between God and humanity. The two subjects, God and man, form the basis of such a love relationship and though initiated by God, must be experienced by man to become existentially viable. As it is so aptly said by the writer of Romans in the fifth verse of the fifth chapter, “The love of God is shared abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.” That love is shared in us by God and, consequently, ideally expressed through us by God as an existential reality.

Love, as an act of benevolent care, necessitates an object to which such attention is given. Both within the triune Godhead and the context of human existence, love is attributed as a divine act towards humanity and an attitudinal act towards God. The use of the term “an attitudinal act” to refer to the human response suggests that the kind of loving from the human perspective is notably a channeling of God's love with the willingness to be so influenced by God. The scripture notes that the love of God is made evident to the human heart by the Holy Spirit who disseminates that love (Romans 5:5). It becomes evident that ‘if we love one another, God dwells in us, and his love is perfected in us’ (1 John 4:12). Perfect love is an existential ideal, realized experientially.

God through us – expressive self-actualization. Stringfellow (2006) once contended that it is only the man who is reconciled with and within himself who is free and able to be reconciled with other men. Love orchestrate a sense of wholeness that unifies object to subject. The art of loving is an act of being. It has been expressed that the fundamental need of the human being is the need to love and be loved. Chapman (2015) likens it to a "love tank" that needs to be filled, a basic human need that is evident throughout human life. In the course of human encounters, love appears both as an internal drive and an external stimulus. When love is expressed, it inspires the subject that is expressing it and influences the object experiencing it. Varied expressions exemplify life; some are dysfunctions, and others are habitually functional regardless of the human shortcomings. However, loving as an act of life is exemplified in Scripture as the ultimate form of human personhood. In the thirteenth chapter of Corinthians, Paul noted that of the three essential traits of human existence, faith, hope, and love, that love is the greatest, the ultimate expression of authentic humanity. Love is being fully human.

The Corinthians chapter appears to indicate that regardless of any form of human expression, from service to sacrifice, if love does not motivate it, it is thereby pointless, without

purpose, and somewhat meaningless. When it is said that God is love and love comes from God, one is led to conclude that the act of love is an act of God and so it ought to be within the contents of the human heart. One could argue that any human act, not influenced and inspired by God, is futile. Loving necessitates the infusion and inspiration of God within the human act for that act to be considered loving. Love is God expressing Himself through human lives and as human, it is the highest form of self-actualization to the extent that it is an act of divinity embracing humanity.

The first Epistle of John, the seventh verse of the fourth chapter records that love comes from God with the implication that He is the source of that love and further identifies the essence of that love to the very nature of God when it concludes that God is love. Further, in the epistle, it is also noted that loving God is a human response to an initiative made by God who first loved.

The Nuances of Love - “So Love”

In discussing the nuances of love, it is intended to outline certain perceived degrees of distinction regarding the act of loving that delineate depths of comprehension. Scripture seems to indicate the degree of distinctions in the art of loving. Implications such as “greater love” (John 15:13), and the use of eros, phileo, and agape give credence to the idea.

“God so loved” is infinite in its scope and immeasurable in its application and to say that “God first loved” renders it conclusive in its origin. Being infinite in loving makes God a complete lover, infinite in the expression of love. In stating that God initiated the art of loving us, the scripture thereby establishes God as the originator, prime mover and the ground of love. God’s loving is both fundamental and foundational. To say that God first loved us is to thereby position the human being as first a recipient of love through experience with God before exhibiting that love as an expression of life. Love is, therefore, a divine prerogative established as an existential reality experienced and then expressed through human beings. To say that God first loved, being

infinite and eternal, is to say that it is impossible for a human, being finite and temporal, to love as God loves. However, while acting in fullest capacity, human beings are able to love like God. God in His infinite capacity and humanity in its finite realm love with the totality of one's being. However, when the finite human is at its best, it is still fully human. It is when the finite human being is embraced by the infinite that it is able to be most godlike in its expression. Love informed by God fosters true loving. Any expression, without that consciousness of God, is loveless.

Loving by Comparison – “More Than These”. In the gospel, (John 21:15-20), the scripture appears to indicate three possible notions of loving by use of the two Greek words, *phileo* and *agape*. Both are translated as love in that passage. On two occasions, the first is used with a contingent of love being informed by a measure of comparison, followed by the use of the same word to indicate love instructed by the context of an external contribution. It is seen both as an overt and covert expression with the act of loving being an expression that finds both significance by association and significance by acquisition. While *phileo* appears to be used in both an infinitive and accusative sense, *agape* incorporates an idea of loving as a covenantal commitment with the definitive idea of love as a one-directional expression.

In the infinitive sense, “lovest thou me more than these” (John 21:15), suggests an act of loving that is influenced and modified by comparison. “To love the Lord” is an infinitive phrase that in this passage finds itself qualified by the clause, “more than these.” In this sense, the Lord is the object that is being loved, but the Lord as the object of love seems to be held in comparison to others. Love informed by comparisons is indicative of finding significance by association. It is a covert means by which love is realized as an apparent consideration informed and inspired by an external stimulus. The value of the object informs the operant conditioning of love.

To love by comparing objects of attraction is to acquire significance by association in the infinitive sense of the word *phileo*. It appears to be based on an attraction to and an acquaintance with observable attributes expressed by the object vying for attention. It is an association that provides a measure of prestige as it alleges a measure of power and privilege by associating with the object loved. Once the comparison is made, and the greater value is assessed, the significance is assumed, not by the choice made, but rather by the value secured. It is then the perceived greatness of the valued object which motivates the act of loving. When love is based on the value of an object in comparison to another, it becomes unstable in its focus as that value must forever prove to be greater than others to retain the attention of the lover. It is the perceived value of the external object that determines the extent of that love and the intent becomes the drive towards association and acquisition as the comparison becomes the point of consideration. When the perceived value seems to be lessened and when abilities are replaced by disabilities, love, in that case, appears to wane with each diminishing instant since it is based on the choice of greater value, “more than these” (John 21:15).

In this initial stage of loving, when the object being loved is not well known, love is barely informed and thereby works on its own fantasy of a desirable outcome. Love finds itself operating on the basis of assumed knowledge, and the contents of the mind engage in an assessment based on the comparison of observable factors. These factors do not at any given time present the full picture of the worth, value and motives of individuals. Loving, based on mere acquaintance leaves much to be desired and, if not further informed, remains superficial at best.

An acquaintance with expressed and desired attributes results in the acknowledgment of a felt attraction, which leads to a measure of admiration that is often disguised as love. In the infinitive sense, the question “lovest thou me?” (John 21:15), presents itself both as an affirmation

to “Love the Lord thy God” (Deuteronomy 6:5) and at times as a command, “Thou shall love the Lord” (Matthew 22:37-39). However, that infinitive phrase places itself in contrast and comparison to the love for others. Love in that infinitive sense is presented as a verb, requiring action, and Christ as the object of that love. When the comparative term “more than these” is applied, it proposes a degree of loving that theorizes one stance against the other, one object above another. Phileo, as it is used in this infinitive sense requires that the object loved becomes the primary focus. However, in the text, “lovest thou me more than these?” it proposes an assessment of observable factors that inform one’s decision. These observable factors are all aspects that are taken into considerations in making a value judgment to facilitate and finalize one’s choice. Furthermore, in choosing, two entities are weighed, and while one is found wanting and inferior, the other is deemed warranted and superior. This choice puts one in a predicament, where a decision made at that level, lends itself to the misfortune of a fragile relationship or a formidable selection.

“Do you love me more than these?” (John 21:15). The question suggests a comparison and infers a degree of distinctions evidenced in the act of loving. The presentation, however, at this point is purely superficial for it does not carry the wealth of knowledge gained by mutual self-disclosure. That mutual self-disclosure precipitates an art of loving at the highest level when it carries both a primary sacrificial drive and secondary satisfying affinity. Mutual self-disclosure is critical to the depth of intimacy, which is characteristic of true love. Mutual self-disclosure must, however, be progressive to the point that it becomes increasingly transparent.

The added dimension of human growth and development makes self-disclosure a process of knowing that is incremental in its revelation. There must be both the authenticity in its revelation and attentiveness in perception to facilitate a measure of understanding necessary for the harmonizing of a relationship between two individuals. The growth factor makes loving a

challenge when its inception is based on the comparing of perceived factors that are yet unfinished and intrinsically immature. Self-disclosure must be incremental in reflection growth experiences.

“Do you truly love me more than these?” (John 21:15). This question raises the idea of an attitude of loving influenced by a “more than/less than” discernment. That category of loving suggests an act of loving that seeks, by comparison, to assess value as a motive for loving. It can be viewed as a covert expression as it relates to the measure by which one determines who to love. The implication of love informed by comparison is evident in the verse.

The dilemma of such a relationship based on comparison is the bipolar vacillating emotional or attitudinal swing caused by competing considerations of observable traits triggering a false sense of superiority over against a false sense of inferiority. Comparing individuals by categorizing issues of superiority and inferiority becomes an underlying concern. Within each category, there will always be some that are in some measure considered more esteemed than others and some to be considered less desirable. However, in each consideration, with the act of loving not being fixed in time as an incorrigible experience, the changing variables of growth and development complicate the matter. It is those variables that make a loving relationship unstable when it is based on comparison since individuals are ever changing.

The unknown aspects of growth and development play a critical role in the act of loving and thereby complicate the experience. Growth implies change, and with the change, comes the need to assess the wisdom of the choices based on comparisons. The change notion incorporates the movement “for better or for worse.” With the human tendency to build on strengths and challenge weaknesses, the predictability of the projected outcome of any individual is a statistical probability at best. When environmental factors are brought into consideration, the nature of any change remains unpredictable, and at times, mere plausible projections. When making a choice

based on the comparisons of the moment, the variables of life only serve to challenge the wisdom of each decision. It could be questioned as to how much is known of the object being loved when the decision to love is made at first encounter or even within the scope of limited exposure. It could also be questioned as to how accurately one can predict the probability of the changes necessary to enhance that relationship into the mutuality of intimate self-disclosure. It is this unpredictability of human nature that challenges the act of loving, especially when it is based on decisions made by comparing one human being to another at any given moment.

The limitations placed on the human mind by its inability to accurately forecast the future make the basis of such love a self-propagating adventure. It is representative of an individual, driven by its own passion and perception grounded in the uncertain, while not knowing who or what the object being loved might become.

In a relationship based entirely on comparing traits, a person is loved by their assumed possessions, and not based on the merits of a personality that has been wisely assessed. This aspect of loving remains unstable in its commitment to any individual for it may find itself again attracted to any competing alternative. In this sense, to love by comparing values is only transient in its engagement as it also demands of the object being loved to continue to be better than any other competing object.

Loving by Content – “Because of These”. The concept of love, when used as *phileo*, carries both an infinitive and accusative clause. In the infinitive sense, it is overt and objective in its scope as it focuses on the value of the object being loved as its primary motivation. The accusative clause carries the covert and subjective factor as it finds its motivation within the individual who is, in fact, attempting to love. The phrase attempting to love is used with the

realization that both the infinitive and accusative are partial in their scope and rather imperfect in delineating the art of loving. To love genuinely necessitates mature self-actualization.

Phileo love, in the accusative sense of the word, lends itself to the notion of finding significance by acquisition. In the text, phileo is also used in an accusative sense in which the question, “Lovest thou me”, when asked a second time appears to be implicit of the idea of having affection for someone, not by comparing values but by acknowledging virtues. It is loving where the object loved becomes the primary source of consideration. It is based on what the object consists of and contributes. To love then, on the basis of content or contribution, becomes an act of the affection and fondness being directed towards another. In so doing, it invites the idea of one loving out of one’s own capacity. But, that capacity does not know its limits in the light of the object being loved. No one truly knows at the time of inception whether one has the capacity to love another enduringly. The prevalence of divorce validates this position as time and experience give insight into the enduring ability or the reducing capacity on one’s proclivity to love. The contributions of both individuals come into consideration in the love relationship. Individual contributions become factors that define the nature and nurturance of the love relationship.

In the accusative sense, both the lover and the one being loved contribute to the relationship; the one being loved experiences a void that needs satisfaction and the lover provides the needed affection. However, in loving, the one who is extending love is acting out of one’s perceived capacity but does not know as to whether one can meet the demands or the needs of the one being loved or even having the capacity to endure all that would be demanded.

The question, “Do you love *me*?” (John 21:17). In the accusative sense, one may raise the question as to whether he/she has the capacity and ability to love. It invoked a measure of personal reflection and evaluated assessment of oneself to the point of realization. Such a realization points

to the notion that this act of loving in the truest sense requires much to be endured and much to be overcome. However, there is a point to which one finds satisfaction in the fulfillment of a need met by the object being loved. The question may be asked then, “Do you love me because of these?” (John 21:17). In this sense, infatuation, as a delightful feeling of satisfaction, could often be mistaken as love. Having a fondness for or an attraction to does not necessarily mean that one is in love but rather it could be considered as an emotional pleasure of a need being met. Lewis (1988) suggested that human beings are progenitors of need-love, a love that is always seeking fulfillment and satisfaction. That satisfaction is in this sense found in the virtues of another.

The lover also seemed to find fulfillment in finding that which satisfies its longing. In that case, the fondness finds a match, the affection finds an attraction, and the desire finds a satisfying complement. It is one finding the individual that complements one’s desire and, in that case, it is the desire that becomes the standard by which suitability and compatibility are measured. “Do *you* love me?” (John 21:17) Christ would ask Peter as if to say in the accusative sense, “Do you find in me what *you* are longing for?” Furthermore, this aspect of loving finds its greatest motivation in answering the question, “What is in it for me?” It is as though human beings are born with certain fundamental needs that have been made much more acute by the varied degree of deprivation experienced in life. What is considered love then, is it a desire seeking satisfaction?

Phileo love, both in the infinitive and accusative sense, lacks the full measure of the divine initiative. Human beings are impacted by influences that are expended to engage the longings within. On the surface, a superficial acquaintance with manifested traits does not lend itself to personal and permanent intimacy. This acquaintance has no inherent depth, for it is founded on observable traits that are determined and expressed with the intention to impress. Also, finding pleasure in a relationship with this determination and expression, provides only a shallow

experience that has no depth to last the test of varied life circumstances. It may provide contentment for a moment, but with the changing experiences of growth, the demands for satisfaction are altered to require considerable adjustments. Agape love is a person-to-person encounter, forged in the citadel of self-disclosure, initiated in sacrifice, with the salvific expectation of reciprocity. Such a love is not determined by comparing one to another nor is it defined by the recipient's personal experience of association or acquisition. This type of love is etched in the commitment of the total person in all its capacity and ability working toward the enrichment of human lives. Agape is not driven by social exchange but by sacrifice and support.

Loving by Commitment – “Because of Me”. Agape love is a covenantal commitment. It is loving for the sake of loving and for the benefit of the object being loved. The concept of the covenant can be seen in scripture as embracing two ideas: that of sacrifice and the other of sufficiency. In the book of Hebrews, both opinions are presented as the seventh and eighth chapter, which speak to a better sacrifice and a better covenant, with the latter representing the satisfaction of an inheritance that follows the testament of death. Love is a covenantal commitment that gives itself sacrificially for one undeserving of such merits. It is a binding commitment to a relationship.

It is the nature of love to live sacrificially. It is the spirit of love to sacrifice. It is in the sacrifice that love has its greatest expression and it is in reciprocity that love finds its greatest fulfillment. Love embraces both commitments at one point of the spectrum and contentment at the other. Love tends to find fulfillment if all it does is sacrifice, for that in itself, is an act of loving. Sacrifice is the ultimate expression of love (John 15:13), and love is the highest expression of one's commitment (Mark 12:31).

Scripture contends that sacrifice without love is profitless (1 Corinthians 13). Though sacrifice is not in itself an indication of love, love itself is sacrificial. One can have sacrifice

without love, but never can there be love without sacrifice. Since love is initiated with a movement from the subject toward an object, inside out, it is objectivized without any guarantee of returns; though it carries as its objective an intended transformation that initiates mutuality.

Agape love when expressed by God, carries the twin concerns of *extent* (the capacity to love) and *intent* (the ability to love). Having the capacity to love in the way that is needed and the ability to meet the demands placed upon the lover. With God, every moment of love is a divine encounter. Every demonstration of love is divinity in its fullest expression as all that God is impacts all that God does. This is exemplified in the term perfect love for it is as holy in loving as it is holy in life. Divine love is the optimum manifestation of both capacity and ability.

One cannot love outside one's capacity and beyond one's ability. Written in scripture is the notion of God loving to God's capacity: "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son" (John 3:16). The capacity of God to love the world, which is deprived and defiled, sinful and evil, is evident. This love engages grace and truth, and though justice demands condemnation, love confronts holiness with its sovereignty while mercy triumphs over justice. That love is transformational and is evident in the sacrifice that God made in Christ. The love of God in Christ balances all that God is at any moment of expression. Tozer (1961) noted that in loving, God never suspends one of his attributes to exercise the other. All of God's attributes, fully informed by each other, with the richness of divinity, make the divine love an incomprehensible act. "God so loved" (John 3:16), speaks of a capacity that is immeasurable and incomprehensible when informed by such attributes as, eternal, infinite, omniscient, omnipotent, and omnipresent. Divine love takes on the character of God in all of God magnitude and is expressed with all of his magnificence.

Agape love takes on the characteristic of all that God is. To love, then, in the agape sense is to be godlike in expression to one's optimum capacity with one's optimal ability. It is loving in a sense to have godlike characteristics and attributes permeating all that one does. This is love in its purest sense, without corruption and guile. It is pure and perfect love; fully God, fully human.

The Necessity of Love - "The Word"

The book of Hebrews, in the first chapter, speaks of God communicating through the prophets and in these last days communicating through Jesus Christ. Jesus Christ is spoken of in the gospel of John as the Word of God, and that Word becoming flesh to dwell among men (John 1:1,14). It is in the incarnation, God becoming man that is the ultimate form of the divine expression of love. The incarnation serves as a revelation made empirical and relevant when the "word became flesh and dwelt among" humans (John 1:14).

In the second chapter of the book of Hebrews, it is noted that Jesus took upon himself the form of humanity to relate and further to represent the human race (Hebrews 2:14-18). It is in the act of being truly man that God not only commended his love to humanity but through a vicarious sacrifice became the savior of the human race. The vicarious sacrifice is expressively noted in the book of John when he writes, "greater love has no man than this that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13). The object of God's love was the redemption of God's creation.

Love, therefore, as an act of God, flowing out of his Being, is one-directional in nature, infinite in essence, limitless in its expression, measureless in experience and flowing out of the very nature of God having no limits and no bounds. As such, love is divinely perfect in its content, omniscient in its scope, omnipresent in its reach, omnipotent in its practice, eternal and everlasting in the realm of its endurance, gracious and merciful in its embrace, just and virtuous in its expressions. However, it is in the human existential experience and expression of such love that

it finds its limits. It is mandated to “owe no man anything, but to love one another” (Romans 13:8). Without love, life is meaningless and hopeless, and living becomes purposeless. The necessity of love is most notable as a virtue unifying human beings in peaceful and productive social engagements being “knitted together in love” (Ephesians 4:16; Colossians 2:2). Salvation is the outcome and the sacrifice is indicative of God’s love (1 John 4:10).

The Needs of Love - “That He Gave”

Paradoxically the scripture notes in Romans 5:5 that “the love of God is shared abroad in our hearts.” This love, however, as a divine attribute, is demonstrated within the context of the human existence being filtered through all its limitations, flaws and shortcomings. Both the perception of that love and the practice of loving is filtered through the limitations of human existence and in so doing the experience, and human imperfections and iconoclastic flaws thereby impact the expression. God initiates love. In scripture, it is stated: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). This record gives insight into aspects of the nature of love as it relates to the knowledge of God. It surveys the dynamics of human interactions and the propensity of its flawed existence. It argues for the reconstruction of the concept of love from the notion of unconditional acceptance of unconditional commitment. It posits love as an act of God fully informed by all the attributes of God. Love is initiated by God in creation and is paradoxical in that it is a divine attribute necessitating human experience and expression.

God’s loves, in the act of redemption, necessitates a “whosoever believes” (John 3:16) as an obligatory response. Love, by itself, is not enough. Love must be informed to be contextually relevant. In sacrificing, love exemplifies a symbol of death that invites the mutual sacrifice of another’s act of love to bring satisfaction and fulfillment. Love does not exist in isolation,

collaborating attributes of God complement it. Love finds itself enriched by the contribution of each attribute. With such capacity and propensity, “love never fails” (1 Corinthians 13:8).

The scripture proposes similar sentiment where the writer to the Philippians requests that “your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment; that ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ. Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God” (Philippians 1: 9-11). Acknowledging the love to all the saints, the writer to the Colossians reported, “We continually ask God to fill you with the knowledge of his will through all the wisdom and understanding that the Spirit gives so that you may live a life worthy of the Lord and please him in every way: bearing fruit in every good work, growing in the knowledge of God” (Colossians 1:9-10 NIV). One is admonished to “add to your faith, virtue; and to virtue, knowledge; and to knowledge, temperance; and to temperance, patience; and to patience, godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, charity” (2 Peter 1:5-7). Love, by itself, is not enough. Contrary to common conception, that once there is love, all will be well; a virtuous life and an educated mind are cornerstones upon which love is established. The love of Christ, Paul says, serves as an internal drive to human endeavors (2 Corinthians 5:14). The love of God informs, inspires and educates to empower. Love is a necessity.

The educated mind is a formidable asset to transformational love. When faced with the contextual need, the well-informed love is most competent. When educated love acts with confidence, faith replaces fear and gives insight into the possibility of success. With high content, loving is a joyous act. Affirmation and confidence induce competence where love is well-informed to meet the demands of what is required to love the desired object. In this case, love is not

frustrated by its limits but rather rises to the occasion when necessary to meet the demands placed upon it. Love authenticates human value and is the repository of human virtues.

Educated love, when informed by God's grace, finds itself with resources beyond its ability to comprehend. High content engages high context, and the well-informed love is confident and competently affirmed to meet its challenges even to the point of sacrifice. Love must be well-informed to be both relevant and resourceful. God shares his love within the human heart.

The Nobility of Love - "His only begotten son."

Jesus came as the living Word to convey the message of salvation, and in the incarnation, God connects with human nature to communicate the message of love. It is in the context of the human relationship that God reveals his love. In commenting on 1 John 1:4, the *Expositor's Bible Commentary* notes (1994); "In God, the message of life also draws near to humanity and finds its culmination in Jesus. In him the Word of life became incarnate, manifested, and hence can be seen, touched and even handled" (p.306). The incarnation provides the opportunity for communion, participation, fellowship and sharing a common good. All these are events and characteristics of love. However, in the incarnation, it bears the intent of a substitutionary sacrifice as an ultimate expression. It is in the incarnation that love is ultimately revealed and made most evident. The image of Christ becomes the standard to which humanity is predestined to be conformed (Romans 8:29) as God works all things together in love. Christ is the embodiment of nobility.

"If any man is in Christ, he is a new creation" (2 Corinthians 5:12). God, who is the embodiment of love, meets man in his present condition. At the point of that initial experience, God immediately begins a process of transformation. This is the transformation that seems to proceed or is concurrent with the reality of being accepted by God. If the transformation precedes or is concurrent with the notion of being accepted, it could be argued then that being accepted by

God is conditional. To be a new creation, sin must be substituted by holiness, the old life by the new, the flesh governed by the spirit, and Christ's life and death must have served as a ransom for human redemption. The injunction that "without holiness, no man shall see the Lord" (Hebrews 12:14), presents holiness as a prerequisite to a restored relationship with God, regardless of whether the word "see" (Hebrews 12:14) carries an eschatological or a transient connotation. It is being argued that there is no acceptance without purity; hence, the admonition to "walk in love" (Ephesians 5:2). However, love preempts acceptance with its unconditional commitment.

In the incarnation, God not only relates to humanity but represents his divinity and as such becomes the definitive expression of the divine revelation. God reveals Himself by becoming man, and as man, becomes known to man as God. It is also by the incarnation that God's love is finally expressed and, thereby, contextually revealed. The love of God towards man is grounded in the act of Christ substitutionary sacrifice. Love is rooted in that sacrifice, an engendering sacrifice that leads to salvation. Salvation represents the restoration and transformation of humanity to a measure of divine acceptability. Love exemplifies God's commitment to such a transformation.

It is in such sacrifice that through the incarnation, love is dramatically revealed. The scope of such a sacrificial expression is noted in the book of Philippians when in the second chapter it is stated that though he was God, he thought it not something to be grasped to be equal with God but took upon himself the form of a servant (Philippians 2:6-7). The incarnation facilitates a revelation to its final expression. Revealed in the incarnation, it is God becoming man and as man, man experiencing God. It is the embodiment of love as an existential reality; an experience of nobility.

The Nurturance of Love - "That Whoever Believes"

The Genesis account of creation (Genesis 1:26-28) introduces humanity as being created in the image and likeness of God. Such expression appears to indicate that the design and destiny

of human beings are to represent and reflect God's glory. It has been indicated (as in Colossians 1:27) that the presence of Christ in the life of the believer is the hope of glory. It has been contended that God is love. In communion and connection with God through Christ, the human being becomes a representation and reflection of God through love. However, the nature of human development is such that it becomes a filter that often influences both the experience and expressions of love. Though love remains the ultimate expression of personhood, that expression finds itself impacted by human filters. Nevertheless, it is an expression of self-actualization.

Humanity's attempts to emulate divine love is limited by the capacity of the human mind to comprehend it. The instrumentality of the Holy Spirit is essential in the process of experiencing and expressing such love as it is the Holy Spirit who reveals love to the human heart (Romans 5:5). It is, therefore, God in us that facilitates the experience of love within the human heart and orchestrates the act of loving through the human life. Man then, becomes what he experiences.

The instrumentality of such a realization is the agency of the Holy Spirit. Scripture clarifies that the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which is given unto us (Romans 5:5). Not only is the Holy Spirit, as God, the very essence of love, but the Holy Spirit serves as the agent of such love being imparted within the human heart. God is Love, love comes from God, and God shares love within the human heart. God reveals what the human heart must realize. And in that realization comes the knowledge of God as the fountain of love.

It is in the human heart that love is foremost revealed through the agency of the Holy Spirit. However, it is in the incarnation and ultimate sacrifice that love is most evidently realized. John 3:19 contends that it is in the incarnational sacrifice that love is perceived and in the vein of such sacrifice, human beings are invited to embrace the act of loving within the context of human relationships. In the incarnation humanity sees God as man and believes in God as God.

Scripture seems to imply that it is in loving that man also evidently reflects the nature of God. Saint John contends that it is in loving that one gives evidence of the knowledge of God (1 John 4:8). The scripture further indicates, “He that dwells in love dwells in God and God in him” (1 John 4:16). The idea of dwelling carries the connotation of being at home, to reside in such a state and to continue in such expectancy. Love, when defined as “God expressing himself” (Hebrews 1:13) lends to the notion that to dwell in God is to dwell in love. A relationship with God is an affiliation with love; it is participating in the very nature of God. Love expressed from God finds itself to be limited by the capacity of the human life to comprehend it. However, the human ability to express it, is gifted by the presence of God that communicates it and the purpose of God that nurtures it. With God, human believe becomes a behavior, representing God’s love.

Love, therefore, is relational. It is one-directional in its expression, relational in its experience and divine in its essence. “But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that this all-surpassing power is from God and not from us” (2 Corinthians 4:7). Love must be filtered through the gamut of human variables in its attempt to be relevant to human existence.

In scripture, the act of God loving invites reciprocity and initiates generosity. It is love as it is initiated, “we love him because he first loves us” (1 John 4:19), that inspires a reaction to love, “for Christ’s love compels us” (2 Corinthians 5:14). However, the movement from a position of indifference to an undifferentiated act of “perfect love” (1 John 4:18) cannot be attained without the internalization of God’s love as it is “poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us” (Romans 5:5). God’s love, as it is internalized within the human heart becomes an empowering motivation and enacts a movement towards self-actualization informed and inspired by the tenet of that love. However, “perfect love” (1 John 4:18) enacted within the human heart, takes on imperfect expressions until the human heart is refined and stripped of all

but the single-mindedness of unconditional commitment. Love must, therefore, be untarnished from finding significance by association based on the comparison of one human being to another. Love must be cleared from finding significance by acquisition based on self-based contentment, until it finds significance by self-actualization based on unconditional commitment. To love in the agape sense is to desire one thing; to unconditionally give of oneself for the betterment of another. It serves as an empirical response to, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

The Nexus of Love - “Should not Perish.”

From the divine initiative, agape takes on a deeper and more fundamental stance. The self-disclosure of God as is revealed in the incarnation is often portrayed as the evidence of God’s love, *Agape*. Agape love may incorporate elements evidenced in *phileo*. However, agape love differs from *phileo* love in that agape love is driven by the genuineness of self-disclosure externalizing both the ultimate capacity and optimum ability of God, while *phileo* love is capped by human limitations. Throughout the litany of scripture God in Christ, through Christ and by Christ is presented as the distinct evidence of God’s love in the act of incarnation. In the scripture, John 3:16 is well-known to portray both the extent and intent of God’s love – its capacity and the ability.

Love, in its ultimate capacity, takes on the character of God. Love in its optimal ability engages all the resources of God. On the one hand, all that is God is expressed, and on the other, all that God has is extended. In reality, God so loved the world that he gave to concede. But that which is to be conceded must be first impacted, informed and inspired by God’s love. The scripture dictates, to love God and love your neighbor as yourself is the foundation upon which all of life finds existential and meaningful existence. In the process of reciprocity, the divine self-disclosure in part contributes to the human self-actualization when humanity takes on the divine quality of unconditional commitment. In such a commitment the human being becomes most like God.

Perfect love dismisses fear, and there is no fear in love (1 John 4:18). When love is perfect, it implies one-directional centeredness and commitment to the person being loved with the intent of securing the best for that individual. Loving God, self, and others are clarified in the statement to render to Caesar what is his and to God what is God's (Mark 12:17). Love then does not discriminate and is without disillusion as even toward one's enemy one is still mandated to love (Matthew 5:14). Being godlike in life and living requires not only a transformed life but a reformed lifestyle; which is the life that imitates God's goodness and mercy. A life becoming godlike.

Agape love sacrifices with the optimistic outcome of a favorable transformation. Love sacrifices altruistically. Being rooted in the sacrifice that implies the loss of whatever is being sacrificed, agape love does not expect to receive and is in no position to gain. Sacrifice implies the death of the one being sacrificed for the benefit of the other that it represents. Agape love is thereby selfless in the process of sacrifice, but salvific in the fact that it gives of itself that another might gain the valued benefit of its worth. In such case, agape love at its core is one-directional; giving sacrificially without the prospect of receiving. In the act of reciprocity, in the same way that love gives for another, in some sense it is given life through another's gift when the initial recipient practices that same act of sacrificial love towards the initial giver. Love's intent is to be transformational in its giving and to be revitalized in its receiving. Love reproduces itself.

Self-actualization is the ultimate form of self-disclosure and self-disclosure is the most intimate form of self-expression. In agape love, humanity is faced with the depth of God's being beyond the scope of human understanding. Revelation is the divine method of self-disclosure, and the incarnation is the ultimate expression of self-actualization: "To wit that God was in Christ reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Corinthians 5:19). Agape love demands an ultimate experience of person-to-person intimacy. An intimacy that emulates communion with God.

As stated previously, agape love engages both one's capacity and ability as it takes on the character of the one loving and is informed by the potential of the lover to inform the act of love. All of God's attributes fully inform God's love, and when God loves, God's immutability implies that he cannot love less than all that he is. In loving, God takes into consideration the capacity of the human mind to conceive it. Paraphrasing 1 Corinthians 1:23, this act of loving, from divine to human, is said to be perceived as foolishness to the self-informed and a stumbling block to the self-assured aggrandizer. That aspect of loving is beyond human comprehension.

Self-actualization is the highest form of self-expression. Love is God expressing himself informed by all that He is with the intent of having a person to personal intimacy. This intimacy is potentially becoming transformative (2 Corinthians 5:19). The transformative power is impacted first by the substitutionary sacrifice and then by the sufficiency of salvation. Love, as sacrifice, is substitutionary and representative in that it gives of itself not to its own benefit but solely for that of another. A sacrifice is a representative form of giving – it dies that another might live. When sacrifice is representative and efficient, the beneficiary becomes a recipient of benefits, which, in some sense, makes the beneficiary indebted to the benefactor. Love liberates, and that liberation invokes a commitment to love in response to the sacrificial commitment of the first lover. Fromm (1998) presents such liberations as “liberation from the dominance of greed and the shackles of illusion” (p.6). In keeping with Fromm (1998), love not only liberates from the desire to possess but also envisions another's progress. Love is a giving act; and reciprocity is love receiving. With reciprocity, love finds fulfillment as it generates its likeness in the life of another.

It is the sacrifice of love that generates a response of the conscious mind. Barring any cognitive obstacle, love's sacrifice always calls for a response “freely receiving and freely giving” (Matthew 10:8). However, since the intent of love is to seek the best interest of the object being

loved, it liberates without liability, and in fact, becomes an asset to life since the other aspect of love is restoration. With this distinction come certain delineations; the notion of loving God, oneself and others. Love perpetuates human existence by embracing the diving initiative.

Dimensions of Loving - “But Have Everlasting Life”

God has revealed his love by the things he does. “Herein is love,” (1 John 4:10) the scripture says, “not that we love God but that he loved us and sent his son to be the propitiation for our sins” (1 John 4:10). And again, the well-known John 3:16, for God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son. It is in the incarnation that love is made most visibly evident. In the person of Jesus Christ, we find God’s foundational and functional approach to communicating His love. God’s love is incarnational, both personal and relational, visible and vicarious.

However, the projection of love to the human life as revealed by God is intended to bring humanity to the realization of that love. For this love to be subjectively viable, it must be objectively evident. Successful loving must be viewed, assessed and evaluated from the three dimensions of the human existence; the inward, outward and upward dimension. These dimensions are exemplified existentially in loving God, loving self and loving others. What then constitutes successful loving? And, when is love considered successful?

Responding to the question regarding the greatest commandment, Jesus responded that loving God with all the heart, soul, and mind and loving one’s neighbor as oneself stand unrivaled (Matthew 22:36-40). Love outflows in one direction but operates on three dimensions.

The inward dimension is the love for self that exemplifies a degree of content. It carries the notion of self-realization. It is within this context that loving takes on the peculiarities of the person loving as it flows through the human filters. Love within such a context is uniquely expressed. Love’s expression is limited to the capabilities and distinctiveness of the one loving.

“*So, let each one gives as he purposes in his heart, not grudgingly or of necessity; for God loves a cheerful giver*” (2 Corinthians 9:7). The inward direction is that of self-realization that leads to self-actualization. This inward love is a determination of the content of one’s life with its potential regarding human accomplishments influenced by a consciousness of the divine presence.

The outer dimension is exemplified in love for others. It carries the tenet of social responsibility. It is a degree of commitment to social action and communal interaction. Engaging both social and communal concerns, love engages a lineage, legacy and leverage perspective. “Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law” (Romans 13:8). Love must be incarnated in that it becomes fleshed out in social and communal acts of compassion; mercy, justice and goodwill to all.

The third dimension is that of the upward dimension. This notion of loving carries the consciousness of spiritual reality. Both proprietorship and stewardship are considered as love is then seen as possession and profession – an experience and an expression. This direction embodies the idea of spiritual royalty. The act of loving God expresses a degree of commitment to love with the consciousness of God’s manifestation of love as illustrated in the incarnation.

Successful loving with the consciousness of God is not measured by the degree of approximation but by the degree of similitude, not a matter of resemblance but of representation. It is not so much as to how much one’s love resembles the love of God but rather how accurately such love represents God’s love. Speaking of godlikeness in loving, John referenced the Christ, “as the Father has sent me, even so, I am sending you” (John 20:21). It is a matter of similitude and exactness, authenticity and genuineness. Love emulates God. From the argument that “love comes from God” (1 John 4:9) and “the love of God is shared in the human heart” (Romans 5:5), to having “this treasure in earthen vessels that the excellency of the power might be of God” (2

Corinthians 4:7), love is the activity of God in and through the human life as an existential reality. As an experience, it occasions a transformation towards self-realization, equipped and empowered. As an expression, it fosters transcendence towards self-actualization, valued and validated. Then too, it presents itself ultimately towards God, redeemed and reconciled.

Love is of God, preexisting before the creation of humankind. And, as an act of creation, God created in love and God later redeems fallen humanity in love. Love is expressed as God's unconditional commitment to create and then to redeem, requiring both purity and power. Love redeems as it purifies and empowers as it restores. In redemption and restoration, love makes humanity godlike, acquiring virtues of divinity. Divinity then informs humanity. To this end, love must be genuine and authentic, informed and inspired: for love is God expressing Himself to and through the human heart, restoring, refining, and reconstructing redemptive relationships.

Literature Review

The review of literature about love is not an exhaustive approach. However, to reconstruct the concept of love as unconditional commitment is an inference drawn from the complexity encountered when love is presented as unconditional acceptance. With the idea that love is initiated as a divine manifestation and the idea that love is subsequently existentially experienced and expressed through filters of human personality, love is as perplexing as it is complex. In their work, *A General Theory of Love* (Lewis et al., 2000), it was noted, “Love’s secrets remained buried within the most impenetrable treasure chest the world has ever known: a tangle of a hundred billion cells, whose innumerable electrical currents and chemical signals come together to create a single, living human brain” (p.6). Impenetrable yet impressionable love is as human as it is divine.

As a divine expression, humanly experienced, love is a mystical encounter that embraces the supernatural to bring together God and humanity into a reciprocal engagement.

The Perplexity of Love

In his book, *The Knowledge of the Holy*, Tozer (1961) gives insight regarding the nature of God in which he discusses certain attributes of God. Though his writings cover a variety of attributes, the following are highlighted to illustrate love as it relates to a divine expression influenced and informed by divine attributes. Tozer (1961) wrote that God is self-existent and self-sufficient and as such God has no origin, is self-caused and “whatever God is and all that God is, He is in himself” (p.32). Such a position implies that God, therefore, needs nothing out of himself to authenticate his existence. When it is said that the attributes of God are self-caused, it leaves one to think that the attributes of God stream out of God’s Being with a one-directional thrust. God’s attributes exist as manifestations of His essence that are self-caused and self-sufficient and externalized in one-direction – from God, outward. As infinite, God is limitless and

measureless, without growth, without addition, never less, never more; God is what God is in Himself. Tozer (1961) argues further that “because God’s nature is infinite, everything that flows out of it is infinite also” (p.46). In speaking of the love of God, Tozer (1961) wrote:

From God’s other known attributes, we may learn much about his love...

Because God is self-existent, His love has no beginning; because He is eternal, His love can have no end; because he is infinite, it has no limits; because he is holy, it is the quintessence of all spotless purity (p.98).

Oord and Lodahl (2005) in their work, *Relational Holiness* wrote, “We believe that the most fundamental claim about who God is – the very heart of an adequate doctrine of God- derived from this simple three-word sentence: “God is love”” (1 John 4:16). They further contend that “God’s essence is love and God acts lovingly out of that essence” (p.71). To say that God’s essence is love is to say that love is an essential attribute of God. When God acts, God acts essentially out of love. It is the essential bond of the divine trinity.

Love exists as an essential attribute within the nature of the Godhead and initiates an expression, experienced by all of creation. Love is not blind nor is it manifested in ignorance. It is manifested by an innate awareness that is evident in its experience and expression. That awareness is complex though often simplified in the common and varied use of the word. It is Tozer (1961) who argued that:

We can know for instance, that because God is self-existent, His love has no need;

Because He is eternal, His love can have no end; because He is infinite, it has no limits;

Because He is holy, it is the quintessence of all spotless purity (p.98).

It is in the light of such complexity that a definition of love is difficult to conceive except to note that love is God expressing his divinity manifested through various attributes. It is a divine virtue that incorporates all the other attributes of God in the single act of redemption. This is an act that is evident in the incarnation. Love is divine self-disclosure.

Tozer (1961) reminds us that everything that God is, is always in every act that God does. God cannot differ from Himself. Tozer (1961) contends that God is never less than He is and all of God's attributes are present in any of God's expressions. God's expression of love is an expression of himself in his essential being.

It leaves us to conclude that God is love, not in the sense that love is God but that love, in essence, is the expression of the fullness of God. Both Tozer (1961) and Fromm (1998) argued that to equate love with God is a misrepresentation of scripture. However, to argue as Tozer (1961) "God being who he is, cannot cease to be what he is, and being what he is, He cannot act out of character with Himself" (p.79).

When God loves, God loves out of His own being in the fullness of the Godhead and as such love being nothing less of the fullness of God. All that God is, says Tozer (1961), must accord with all that God does. God is love in the sense that love is God expressing Himself as the self-sufficient and self-existent trinity in unity having nothing outside of himself to contribute to His being and behaving. Love as a divine expression engages the fullness of God with all of God's attributes influencing each act.

When Jeanrond (2010) make the distinction that love is not a principle, but a praxis, he raised concerns about love being treated as a theory or doctrine. He sought to focus on the actual encounter of persons and ongoing critical self-reflection. To Jeanrond, love is the dynamic engagement between individuals. Erich Fromm (2006), in *The Art of Loving*, not only presents

love as art but argued that the practice of such an art is the more difficult problem. He surmises further that “there is hardly any activity, any enterprise, which is started with such tremendous hopes and expectation, and yet, which fails so regularly, as love” (p.4). He further contended that in learning any art, one must aspire to both mastering the theory and mastering the practice. However, the experience of the love of God within the human vessel is inadvertently affected on both levels, cognitively and empirically theory and practice. In the attempt to master theory and practice, in the area that Jeanrond (2010) refers to as “praxis”, limitations from the human standpoint remain boundless.

On the cognitive level, conceptualizing the theoretical aspect of the love of God implies the perceptual encounter of a divine act within the context of the human mind that is culturally and socially conditioned with added distinctions of personality traits that oftentimes operate as filters to inadvertently influence one’s perception. Within the scope of human personality traits, love is often limited in its experience and expressions by both the conditioning of culture and the idiosyncrasies of the personality types. Human personality types serve as peculiar idiosyncrasies and dispositional traits that act as filters. Personality types do influence one’s perception of the divine love as it is experienced and expressed on the existential plane of human interaction.

On the practical level, love expressively takes on the characteristics of the individual that is embracing it. The expression of love, as it is experienced, follows the same path of being couched within traits that are at times diametrically different and though unique, could serve as barriers to the act of loving.

The Paradox of Loving – “Divine Treasure in Earthen Vessels”

Love, as an essential expression of God’s nature, must be effectively communicated to be existentially realized. Beck (1989), in his book entitled, *Love is Never Enough*, raises the questions

of love's inability and inadequacy to keep couples together. The question introduces the ineffectiveness of love without the necessary supporting attributes. Love must be communicated effectively, and such communication requires the skill of interpersonal relationship. It is in the how-to of loving, relevant to the one being loved, that love often fails.

Theorists, such as Erikson (1950), Freud (1963), and Kernberg (1984), speak of the ego, its formation, and its function, as a mitigating presence between the id and superego. Its functions include reality testing with the adoption of defense mechanisms to cope with life's conflicts. In its function at testing reality, the bruised and battered ego of the traumatized individual is limited in its capacity to accept genuine love and thereby unable in its ability to express the consistency of authentic love. When the ego is misinformed, reality becomes altered, self becomes idolized.

The ego as noted by Berzoff, Flanagan, & Hertz (2002) in its organizing and synthesizing functions "facilitates all of the routine mental activities (loving, learning, playing acquiring new skills and capabilities, etc.) that characterize human experience" (p.69). The ability to differentiate between the wishes and fears of the internal reality and that of the external world of actual events is critical for an enduring and functional sense of personhood. It is this sense of personhood as orchestrated by ego functions that often determines both how love is received and how it is expressed. This sense of self-remains critical to the act of loving as in the early stage of ego development perception could be skewed by experience and thereby inform behavior.

The tenets of Ego Psychology speak of the ego as the aspect of the personality that serves in reality testing (Berzoff, Flanagan, & Hertz, 2002; Goldstein, 1995). Goldstein (1995) referred to the ego as an "essential means by which an individual adapts to the external world" (p.53). With episodes of experience shaping the nature of its development, the theory posits the developmental outcome of a true self or false self and either becoming the lens through which reality is tested and

embraced. Also evident are the defenses that serve as adaptive, or to the extreme, maladaptive coping mechanisms. Such a position seems to provide insight into a paradigm shift in loving; the tendency of the false self to distort reality and the propensity of the true self to affirm it. The question then becomes evident as to how such a self that distorts reality taints both the experience and expression of the divine love that has been spread abroad in the heart of the individual.

To love God and to love one's neighbor as oneself becomes challenging since the distorting tendencies of the false self would consequently have a truncating and tainted effect of the nature of that love. It leaves one to wonder whether the mandate of scripture to "be transformed by the renewing of the mind" (Romans 12:2) suggest an anti-conforming antidote towards the reconstruction of a true-self that proves what is "good and acceptable" (Roman 12:2). Even then, however, the social construction of reality presents a challenge to the individual's perception of society. Society reportedly determines ethics, influences morals and validates life. Love as a social engagement seeks validation within the construct of societal norms. Reality is often socially constructed. Human beings are often engaged in social exchanges and cost benefit analysis.

Lewis (1960) in his introduction of his work entitled *The Four Loves* introduces the distinction between gift-love and need-love. Lewis speaks of divine love as gift-love though it is also evidenced in human expressions. Lewis argued that God lacks nothing and is not affected by our need-love. Need-love is exclusively the condition of the human being. Contrasting the two, Lewis contends that "man approaches God most nearly when he is in one sense least like God" (p.4). The challenge of the human being, which is essentially need-love to become a vehicle of gift-love is a perplexing paradox. The mandate to deny oneself to become other than oneself is the paradox of loving. It is like God becoming like man and man attempting to be like god. It is in

one's attempt to love God that one becomes most like God, and in so doing, love becomes genuine and authentic. Loving God is the most ardent test of genuine love.

Lewis (1960) has argued that man has been given the natural capacity to exercise gift-love like God. He contends that man still needs God's help to authenticate such expression as genuine gift-love. However, the nature of that human act of loving is distinct from that of God as both expressions reflect the unique characterization of either being. Love, originating and initiated by God is infused with the virtues of the divine attributes of God. Love, imparted and enacted within the human life, bears the likeness and limitations of humanity even when attempting to reflect the likeness of God during the act of loving. Human love serves as a reflection of a divine encounter mirroring and modeling divine attributes, without which, love ceases to exist.

The Predilection of Loving Others

The issues of communication further complicate the uniqueness of the human development traits as it relates to the act of loving. Chapman (2015), in his work, *The Five Love Languages*, talks about the existence of five emotional love languages and the challenges of discovering one's spouse's primary love language to make the effort of loving most productive. In speaking of the issues regarding primary love language, the concern of such communication skills does not refer only to the relationship between spousal partners but applies to all relationships. To summarize the thoughts presented by Chapman (2015), love languages follow the need for affirmation, attention, adornment, adoration, and affection. With such unique ways of conditioned communication, the act of loving is thereby filtered through the lens of individual predispositions. Language influences communication and comprehension. It also defines reality and determines perception.

However, though the concept of love languages might be acceptable in the course of normal

development, human beings are also affected by traumatic experiences that, at times, cause a shift away from normalcy into abnormal and dysfunctional patterns of behavior. These dysfunctional patterns of behavior referred to as schemas (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003) become lenses through which all experiences are analyzed, assessed and consequently negotiated in action and response. Love makes one vulnerable for it favors authenticity and genuineness.

Powell (1969) in his work, *Why Am I Afraid to Tell You Who I AM*, raises the concerns of the human scars and pains that inadvertently hinder the way to true and genuine love. He noted that these scars affect true communication upon which true love is built. Powell (1969) further speaks of the individual's attempt to cope by forming patterns of defenses that become self-deceptive as to cause one to forfeit all sense of identity and integrity. Self-deception is self-defeating and love-rejecting.

The trauma that human beings encounter often leaves wounds and scars that somehow influence the human mind and emotions affecting the process of socialization. Herman (1992) spoke of trauma as causing an unbearable emotional reaction that produces an altered state of consciousness – a condition of dissociation and the double consciousness. The negative impact of trauma become lenses through which ongoing relationships are realized and, in some sense, regulated. Regulated through the lenses of a traumatic experience, relationships are thereby compromised. Powell (1978) speaks of scars and pain that are conditional to feelings of anxiety, guilt, and inferiority. Powell noting further that anxiety generates phobias that are compounded by the intermittent feelings of guilt that create feelings of inadequacy. Feelings of inadequacy are known to affect not only one's self-worth but one's sense of self-acceptance.

Freud (1963) and other psychosocial theorists (Young, Klosko, & Weishaar, 2003) speak of the influence of relational trauma as it shapes the development of human life. Maddi (1996)

subdivides the theories into conflict, fulfillment and consistency model. However, regardless of the theory and the stages of development it is evident that human lives are affected by their environment and in turn influence the way they view the world. Trauma compresses the human mind into dysfunctional schemas. As such, the act of loving remains handicapped by the trauma of past experiences that render it difficult to exercise authentic love. In such a state, loving is infected by the pain of the past and affected by the perception of inadequacies.

Young, Klosko, & Weishaar (2003) in *Schema Therapy* suggest that human beings experience the development of cognitive patterns that begin early in our development and repeat throughout life. These cognitive and emotional patterns, beginning in early childhood in the context of the relationship environment, influence both the assimilation and internalization of information. These patterns determine the way experiences are analyzed, interpreted and responded to. Young et al., (2003) argues that these patterns drive behaviors that are at times maladaptive and problematic. In the course of human interaction, the dysfunctional nature of maladaptive schemas distorts perceptions and thereby influences action. In loving then, as schemas drive behavior and determine actions they do invariably serve as regulating filters affecting the act of loving. The act of loving finds itself constricted by the conventions of learned reactions that form habitual patterns of believing and behaving. Love is altered as human behavior falters.

Fromm (2006) raised three erroneous attitudes held by those who fail to learn more about the art of loving. First, he identifies those who are focused on being loved rather than focusing on one's capacity to love. Second, is the attitude of seeing the problem of love as a problem of an object being loved, rather than that of the faculty of loving. Fromm lists the third erroneous attitude as the confusing thought of falling in love rather than a state of being in love. An action is said to

be predetermined by attitude. Attitudes are predispositions influenced by core beliefs. Love is left to be contextualized and actualized to the extent to which it is conceptualized.

Proposing discipline, concentration and patience as necessary factors, Fromm (2006) further argues that one needs to come to the realization that love is an art and there is a need to master both the theory and the practice. It is in mastery of those two processes that loving finds itself polarized between experience and expression, theory and practice, learning and loving. The view of love as an art requiring the process of mastery is revolutionary to the human mind.

Unlike agape, with its unconditional commitment, phileo, carries a measure of self-centered gratification that remains provisional and entitled. Instead of a lasting commitment to an individual, it finds itself constantly challenged by competing values. When such loving finds itself entitled and demanding, in the words of Lewis (1960), it becomes a god and in fact, demonized. It takes upon itself the nature of God as to require the best for itself without having the level of divine perfection to merit such compliance. It requires by comparison that the best be devoted to it yet in itself it is of no higher quality. Lewis' (1960) concept of "need-love" carries a similar sentiment. Lewis (1960, p.8) contended that "we may give our human loves the unconditional allegiance which we owe only to God; then they become a god; then they become demons." It is at the point where love, based on the comparison, finds significance by association to that which it perceives to be best, that it becomes demonized in its expectations. Lewis (1960) further argued that when natural loves are demonized by becoming gods, they, in fact, become complicated forms of hatred. Need-love, Lewis (1960) argued, is preceded by a desire and when satisfied, the desire is gone. Such loving is a momentary condition where, as Lewis (1960) noted, "the beloved is seen about our own need and will not last longer than the need" (p.14).

It was Fromm (2006) who wrote, “Most people see the problem of love primarily as that of being loved, rather than that of loving, of one’s capacity to love” (p.1). In discussing the nature of his concerns, Fromm (2006) identifies three points of perceptions that he considers problematic. First is the problem of acquisition as a means of significance and lovability. Second is that of association with an object that is seen as an attraction. Third, is the distinction between doing and being, as an initial experience of falling in love to the permanent state of being in love. The points of view presented by Fromm (2006) appear to indicate degrees of significance attributed to the art of loving. They indicate the degree of distinctions ranging from a symbolic act of loving to the symbiotic act of loving. They indicate a journey from the point of symbolic attraction informed by perceived attributes to the point of symbiotic actualizations of everyone in love exemplified by substitutionary sacrifice. Love then becomes a one-directional expression with an outward thrust that is unconditional.

Mason (2005) in his work, *The Mystery of Marriage* argued that for love, to be love, it must be unconditional. In his argument, he noted that the natural human inclination seeks oneness than increasing separation, and further concludes that “only unconditional love is a powerful enough elixir to reverse this trend and to keep a marriage fresh and growing” (p.202). He contended that “such love itself initiates growth by always taking the first step -- being first to understand, first to soften the heart, first to forget a wrong, first to shoulder blame” (p.204-205). Love is essential for personal development without which social interaction becomes problematic. Mason (2005) speaks to that needed impact by stating:

Love consists of seeing into the very center of the twistedness and sin and self-love that are in the hearts of another person, and yet not being repelled: holding unto the grace by which we ourselves are loved and finding in it the strength to descend with another into

their darkest place. If we love other people for their saintliness, then we do not love at all.

Love is wasted on saints. It is meant for sinners (p.195).

One might disagree with Mason's (2005) final statement though he makes a convincing statement regarding the sacrifice and salvific characteristics of love. Love is never wasted on saints and love is not meant for sinners only. Unless Mason (2005) denies the existence of God and the mandate to love God, then Mason (2005) is accurate in his perception. Love is necessary both for sinners and saints. It is a social necessity. Love is as much support to the saint as it is sacrificial towards the sinner. It is a necessity for healthy human interaction. When Mason (2005) speaks of love and references the depth of the human condition and the sacrifice necessary to live authentically, he makes love a social necessity for the saint and sinner alike.

The social necessity of love is quite evident when one takes into consideration the dynamics relevant to the issues of violence and war. It has often been argued that the cause of violence is rooted in the dysfunction of early childhood experience as well as the disturbing trauma of exposure to tragic circumstances. Stringfellow (2006) and Tolstoy (2010) have argued that the rationale and result of war regardless of whether it is ascribed as just or justified, is itself an antithesis to the human existence. The disturbing impact is evident in the rise of mental health issues faced by the returning veterans who have been exposed to issues of war. Disturbing as it seems, war has its tragic consequence on the individual, the family, the society, the nation and the world at large. War is detrimental to both individual development and human social dynamics.

Socialization, as well as the influence and impact of family dynamics, serve to generate a blueprint that often determines the ease of choice that one makes. Child development theorists (Berzoff, Flanagan, Hertz, 2002) have underscored the thought that influences may impact the human life in its early stages of development and often play a role in decisions later in life. We

live what we learn, and that learning follows the path of things hidden in the three dimensions of the human psyche, the conscious, the subconscious and the unconscious. Within the realm of the human mind are areas of the human psyche harboring information that has been internalized like a blueprint that determines our choices. It was Powell, (1978) who said, “Our past becomes a prologue for the present and future days of our lives” (p.31). Experience influences perception and informs decisions. As in attachment theory and that of other psychodynamic attempts, it is said our past and as Yerkovich & Yerkovich (2006) declares, our first experience of dependence is impressionable. It reportedly leaves an impression that determines our relationship to everyone around us. Our childhood experiences have set the stage for human expectations upon which life’s relationship is built. It is our unique experience of growth that determines the way we love by seeking that which resonates with familiarity and complement. Love is socially constructed though divinely influenced.

In context to man’s realization of God’s love, Lewis (1960) has contended that it is “Only those into which Love Himself has entered will ascend to Love Himself” (p.136). Love must be existentially realized in the heart of the human beings as a subjective reality if love is to be actualized within the scope of human interaction.

Love transforms and has its healing virtues. Love inspires self-worth in another and when internalized it see one’s value in the eyes of another. Frankfurt (2004) captured this notion by stating: “Love is often understood as being most basically, a response to the perceived worth of the beloved. We are moved to love something, on its account, by an appreciation of what we take to be its exceptionally inherent value” (p.38). Love models towards a mirrored response.

Looking beyond the scars that lay buried within a life that appears to embrace the uncertainty of a hopeless future, love sees value through little acts of resilience. Love is

transformational in its ability to transmit a sense of significance as the lover, by loving, makes the object being loved, valuable. The exceptional inherent value proposed by Frankfurt (2004) is value perceived and projected by the one loving, though, not yet acknowledged and accepted by the one being loved. The perceived worth originates within the being of the one loving and finds itself projected and later interjected by the one being loved. Frankfurt (2004) again noted:

It is true that the beloved invariably is, indeed, valuable to the lover. However, perceiving that value is not at all an indispensable formative or grounding condition of the love. It need not be a perception of value in what he loves that moves the lover to love it. The truly essential relationship between love and the value of the beloved goes in the opposite directions. It is not necessarily as a result of recognizing their value and of being captivated by it that we love things. Rather, what we love necessarily acquires value for us because we love it (p. 38).

Love unites, instills values and substantiates relationships. To be pure, as stated by Kierkegaard (1962), is to will one thing. Love is to will one thing, that is, to commit oneself to exemplify godlikeness. When love embraces both the capacity and ability of the lover, it becomes enriched by the personality traits of the one loving. Loving like God does not imply that one must love in the same capacity and ability as God, even though, loving is sometimes impacted, inspired and informed by God's ability to love. Loving like God may be defined as loving based on one's optimal capacity and ability, operating with a consciousness of God, and infusing every aspect of the human expression. The one-directional aspect of love is the continuous expression of oneself by living a life of godlikeness, which reflects one's utmost potential aligned with the will of God.

As Lewis (1960) concludes, it is the divine life operating under human conditions of our lives that loving becomes God-like. Powell (1999) contends that we must first love ourselves and

quoting Sullivan (1953) he wrote: “when the happiness, security, and well-being of another person is as real or more real to you than your own, you love that person” (p.63). He further concluded that “to the extent that I fail to love myself, to that same extent I will be unable to love others” (p.63).

It was Oord (2010) who aptly describe love as “to act intentionally, in sympathetic response to others (including God) to promote overall well-being” (p.15). In this, the intentionality of love is said to be both willful and deliberate. Citing Powell (1989), love is defined as both a decision and a commitment. Oord (2010) continued by contending that love requires an actual relationship with others arguing that entirely isolated individuals cannot love. Both writers present the act of loving as a decisive and deliberate commitment, a predisposition to love.

Oord (2010) speaks also of a love vocabulary where three linguistic traditions are utilized in the way love is used in communication. First, he spoke of a proper/improper tradition that he referred to as to act purposively. Oord (2010) cited the earliest Greek, New Testament, Augustine and Thomas Aquinas. He noted that within the same tradition, love is also communicated as desire. In this instance Oord (2010) quotes Kierkegaard (1962) who spoke of love as a passion of the emotion. Oord’s second linguistic tradition is referred to as the mutuality tradition. From this tradition, he referenced love as engaging in a personal interaction or relationship where the reciprocity in the relationship is considered to be love. The first speaks of a desire that is purposely driven and the second is mutual reciprocity interaction. The third is noted as the head (loving-kindness) tradition. This tradition describes love as doing good with ideal ethical actions that engender well-being. Combining elements of these three traditions Oord (2010) appeared to have arrived at the determination that love is an “intentional sympathetic response” (p.29). Oord’s

designation of love, essentially viewed both as a sympathetic response and sympathetic act, reflects a perspective that is primarily viewed from a human context and not as a divine initiative.

Oord's (2010) ideas seem to flow from the common use of agape as unconditional acceptance. It focuses on the object being loved as the determining factor in the act of loving. Within the Christian expectation love towards God is a response to love from God, and love towards the neighbor is in response to love for self. However, what of the love from God who first loved? What is God's love a response to? If one is to argue to the point of unconditional acceptance using sin as the basis of the need for acceptance, does it then imply that God's love never existed before the creation of mankind? Does it mean that love did not precede creation? If love must be ascribed to God, it could not be seen as having a beginning or an origin. Nor could it be considered a response. Love is a predisposition. A response is always secondary to the first act that requires a reaction as the answer to a question. If love is a response, then love owes its origin to that which called it to action.

Frankfurt (2004) in his work entitled *The Reasons of Love* argued that "Love is, most centrally, disinterested concern for the existence of what is loved, and for what is good for it" (p.39). A disinterested concern is impartial to self-gratification though loving is in itself gratifying. Love cannot be commanded, forced or legislated. Love is liberating and manifested in the sacrifice that leads towards wholeness. In its incarnation love illustrates its remedial intent.

In his work entitled *The Art of Loving*, Fromm (2006) argued to view love as an activity and not as a passive effect. He referenced love as a standing-in and not a falling-for. In the most general way, the active character of love in is the understanding that love is primarily giving, not receiving. Frankl (1984), in his attempt to find meaning during tragedy, wrote the following:

A thought transfixed me: For the first time in my life, I saw that truth as it is set into song by so many poets proclaimed as the final wisdom by so many thinkers. The truth that love is the ultimate and highest goal to which man can aspire. Then I grasped the meaning of the greatest secret that human poetry and human thought and belief have to impart: the salvation of man is through love and in love I understood how a man who has nothing left in this world still may know bliss, be it only for a brief moment, in the contemplation of his beloved. In a position of utter desolation, when man cannot express himself in positive action, when his only achievement may consist in enduring his sufferings in the right way — an honorable way — in such a position man can, through loving contemplation of the image he carries of his beloved, achieve fulfillment (p.57).

Love is seen both as the highest goal, an ultimate byproduct of life, the greatest good, and the optimum process of life. It is the highest goal that human beings can aspire to and the greatest good that could be achieved. Love is both redemptive and transformative, and to that end, love is a noble act as it adds purpose to humanity – achieving fulfillment.

Love is selective in its ongoing commitment as it considers the essence of life and expressions of living. Love cannot be other than itself and ceases to be when it fails to remain consistent. Kierkegaard (1962) argues that love does not love that ceases to love. The challenges of loving self and others can be a demanding task. Loving God possesses its own unique sense of demands though perceptually God is most often presented as perfect. By default, the adjustments in any God/Human relationship are for humans to make. Since love is one-directional as flowing from the lover to the beloved, it is, therefore, necessary to make a distinction between living as an existential reality and loving as an expression of that reality.

Life, as an existential reality, has many variables and as such could be quite problematic when love must be expressed. Jeanrond (2010), also emphasized that;

No experience of love - however, intense, emotionally charged and sweet it may remove the powerful experience of difference. Human desire for community or union with other persons or with God, originates not only in the recognition of likeness and mutuality, but also in the awareness and actual experience of difference and otherness (p. 4).

It is a degree of contextualization. Love must be incarnated in that it becomes fleshed out in social and communal acts of compassion. Love is active and interactive; it is social as it is communal. Noting that love has the potential to affect the entire fabric of our human relationships, Jeanrond (2010) observed:

In spite of all the differences in details, human experience, wisdom and knowledge lead us to approach love as a summary concept for certain kinds of human relationships: relationships that affirm some subject or object, acknowledge its value and are motivated further to explore the subject or object of their attention. Moreover, this kind of relationship is often inspired by an intense desire to seek some sort of union with the other, to enter into deeper community with the other, to form a common body, to become one (p.2).

The growth mindset is based on the notion of change (Dweek, 2008), a change that incorporates the acknowledgment of a new Gestalt, a preferred story, a compromise or meaningful resolution. Jung (2011) cautions that “we must never forget that the crooked paths of a neurosis lead to as many obstinate habits, and that, despite any amount of understanding, these do not

disappear until other habits replace them. But habits are only won by exercise, and appropriate education is the sole means to this end” (p.45).

Old obstinate habits must be replaced by new habits that when normalized in the course of daily living serve to perpetuate the changed behavior. It is that maintenance of the new habit that is in itself, self-transformational. It is a transformation that leads to the externalizing of one’s fullest potential aided by the sacrifice and support of another. Maslow (1971) refers to having “full humanness’ as the ability to abstract..., to be able to love, to have values of a particular kind, to transcend the self” (p.28). It is the actualization of human potentialities. Tillich (1952) defines love as an act of courage - “the readiness to take upon oneself negatives, anticipated by fear, for the sake of fuller positivity” (p.79). This readiness of courage alleges that both the negative and the positive become conscious alternatives. To one end, life dissipates towards annihilation and to the other, life affirms itself with meaningful contents. Tillich (1952) advocated that life requires a balance between courage and fear to attain self-affirmation. It is this balance Tillich considers to be the essence of perfect vitality. “Vitality,” says Tillich (1952) “is the power of creating beyond oneself without losing oneself” (p.81). Such creation, as he suggested, becomes an intentional attempt at meaningful content. That meaningful content is the combining of spiritual creativity to vital dynamics in what is considered virtuous. Tillich (1952) concluded with this statement: “Life, willing to surpass itself, is a good life, and the good life is the courageous life” (p.29). So too, is love. Kierkegaard (1962) noting loves freedom spoke of that capacity to love as most unselfish, freest in its expression, and most faithful in consistency. To love the unlovable is love at its best. Love transforms and reforms human lives.

The old habit of loving as unconditional acceptance needs to be replaced by the new habit of practicing love as an unconditional commitment of a human being. That notion of love engages

God and other human beings in a reciprocal relationship. Human beings, who are co-workers with God, who has this treasure in earthen vessels, is unwavering and unconditionally committed to the art of reconstructing redemptive relationships.

Case Study

Andrew is an English-speaking Caribbean male, 5 feet 10 inches tall and about 55 years old. He grew up with his mother and two siblings, male and female. His father left home when he was a teenager. Andrew reported that he grew up “silent but observant.” He had few friends and though very knowledgeable of sports played very little. He plays an instrument that he considers to be his pass time. He reports to be of sound health, works in the medical profession and has a college education. He is of medium built, fair skin tone, and presentably attired. He migrated to the United States a few months after his wife who had returned to the Caribbean for the marriage ceremony.

Sarah is of Caribbean descendant. Having migrated to the United States early in her teenage years, she completed her college education and entered the workforce. She served as an office administrator and loved her job. Sarah is 5 feet 6 inches tall, fair skin tone, slender and physically attractive. Sarah grew up with both mother and father but lost her father in early adulthood. She aligned herself with her maternal grandmother who remained in the Caribbean and except for the folks at church she had very few friends to relate to. Sarah has two siblings. After having her first child, Sarah became a stay-at-home-mom.

Andrew and Sarah have been married for 25 years. Andrew is now in his early 50's and Sarah in her late 40's. Andrew and Sarah have three children, one of which came late in their marriage, unexpected and unplanned.

Andrew has had many sexual relationships before he met Sarah and Sarah was a virgin when she met Andrew. While Sarah stated that Andrew was admired for his knowledge of life, Andrew saw Sarah as “better” than the other girls that he had been involved with as she had a

religious commitment and was very ambitious. Sarah married Andrew despite concerns raised by her siblings.

With the introduction of children early in their marriage, Sarah's goals and career aspirations had to be curtailed to accommodate raising the family. Sarah did not work until her second child was school-aged and even then, she worked part-time. The demands of family life altered her schooling. Andrew worked part-time while attending evening classes. Sarah reported having difficulties in her relationship, citing lack of affection, sexual demands, lack of parenting support and suspicions about Andrew's allegiance to the women in his past.

Having a third child when Sarah began to work full time further complicated the relationship. Andrew and Sarah had separated and had renewed their relationship a few months prior to her pregnancy. Abortion became an issue of contention, and Sarah was adamant about keeping the child. Though questions were raised about the possibility of birth disorders, Sarah's faith and religious convictions kept her committed to the pregnancy.

Within the first few years of the youngest child's life, Andrew found interest in seeking another female that he perceived to be more progressive, more engaging and more promising than Sarah. Sarah continued to struggle with the hurt of betrayal and abandonment, while Andrew sought significance by attachment to what he perceived as competing for an object of greater value. At the root of such complexity are the values perceived by Andrew to be the object of his desire.

The older siblings have left the house and are living separate lives. The youngest remains at home. The relationship continued to be a challenge as some reported issues surfaced. Sarah recorded conversations of Andrew's interaction with other women. In addition, issues of masturbation, accusations of sexual pressure and calls from other women accusing her of being frigid brought Sarah to a breaking point.

Sarah came seeking help to address issues in the relationship though she believed she is much more inclined to separate and terminate than to live with Andrew. Andrew agreed to attend therapy but did not follow through. Sarah came in for individual counseling to address her emotional and mental state. She also sought assistance to determine her life's alternatives. Powell (1978) leaves one to ponder whether the life of love, which he noted, involves a permanent and unconditional commitment to the happiness of another, is the way to personal happiness and fulfillment. Love requires a foundation of fundamentals upon which to build a nurturing relationship.

Since both individuals were ambivalent about continuing the relationship and Andrew had focused his commitment elsewhere, the objective of counseling was to focus primarily on the individuals and not the marriage. The intent was to strengthen and equip both individuals, that whether they remain together or separate they would develop the coping skills to face the outcome and lead productive lives beyond the current situation. The principles drawn from the reconstruction of love as unconditional commitment will be applied with the use of various therapeutic and theological viewpoints.

Case Progress Notes

The reconstruction of love as an unconditional commitment in the lives of Andrew and Sarah.

The conceptual use of love as a therapeutic motif involves the idea of unconditional commitment. It embraces the notions of substitutionary sacrifice and supportive subsistence undergirded by the prospect of reconstructing redemptive relationships.

Three fundamental tenets that are essential in reconstructing redemptive relationships are self-identity, self-worth, and self-affirmation. These three are reconstructed to incorporate the

virtues of substitutionary sacrifice and supportive subsistence to be embodied in a self that is unconditionally committed to the object loved. The following is the attempt made to reconstruct these three tenets in the minds of Andrew and Sarah, thereby equipping them to be unconditionally committed to God, self, and others within the context of their relationship. Facing ambivalence (Sarah) and resistance (Andrew), the question of the relationship's outcome hinges on what aspect of the self; its identity, its worth or its affirmation remains damaged and unresolved. Self-actualization is an expression of all of these and is thereby limited and tainted to the extent that either one of these remains injured. The relationship and its reconstruction require that the two individuals go through the process of healing in all three aspects of their being. And, to the extent to which one remains injured is the extent to which the relationship suffers.

Session One – In Office Scheduled Visit

Each session was 50 minutes in duration and held weekly. Andrew and Sarah came to the first session to share their concerns about the relationship and their intent. Andrew and Sarah were living together at the time. They were once separated but reconciled at which time their third child was born. The child is now 11 years old, and the relationship is in distress.

After detailing issues of safety and confidentiality and outlining a contract (see Appendix A), the following information summarizes the complexity of their concerns raised during the initial conversations.

1. Andrew had been very sexually active before marriage and continued throughout the relationship. Sarah was a virgin.
2. After marriage, they both separated. Sarah returned to the United States while Andrew remained in the Caribbean.
3. Andrew was from a broken family with an absent father. Andrew noted that his father's absence left him "silent but observant," a trait that continued throughout the relationship.
4. Andrew engaged Sarah with the mindset of comparing her with other girls, noting that her advantage was that she was religious and at church. Andrew was not consistent in his Christian faith.
5. Parenting issues including differing values with regards to the children were also sources of conflict.
6. Andrew and Sarah separated for about two years and reconnected. Sarah got pregnant with her third within weeks of reconciliation.
7. The third child raises moral challenges regarding the issue of abortion.

8. Andrew had multiple relationships, issues of masturbation and sexual conversation with other women. Sarah was also harassed by these women.
9. Trust, betrayed, diminishing self-worth, guilt, shame, hurt, anger and animosity were elements of concern; and
10. Andrew showed disinterest in continuing the relationship. Sarah was ambivalent.

The use of Solution Focused techniques in seeking exceptions with the miracle questions brought insight into moments of satisfaction. Sarah noted that those moments were eclipsed by the fact that Andrew had other relationships during the period. Sarah had secretly recorded Andrew's conversations regarding issues of sex with another woman and had called one of the women that often conversed with him to confirm Andrew's encounters with her. Andrew admitted to having a moment in the extra-marital affair that was worth remembering.

In response to the miracle question, Andrew wished that "all this would go away" but would not elaborate on what specifically he wished would change. Sarah wished Andrew could change but stated that he has been doing what he did for so long that he could not change. Suggesting a substitution of "would not" for "could not," Sarah affirmed that "he could not change". She concluded that she would not believe under such conditions.

Andrew sat silent and contemplative during Sarah's disclosures. He did not speak much during the session as Sarah was very vocal in highlighting the differences and details of their relationship. She listed some themes, such as unfaithfulness, disinterest, unloving, non-caring, heartless, and sexually frustrating.

When confronted about his silence, Andrew noted that Sarah had her own opinion of what transpired but refused to elaborate stating that it would only raise arguments. Sarah's constant

interruptions challenged attempts to set boundaries and solicit information from Andrew with her clarifications and addendums to what Andrew was saying.

Andrew, speaking of Sarah's interruptions, noted that this was the reason that the relationship would not work and that Sarah had too much in her mind that she would not let go. Andrew's projection was evident – unwilling to accept responsibility or take the blame for his alleged actions and misdemeanors.

Andrew's calm demeanor and non-verbal expressions appeared typical of being emotionally disconnected from Sarah. He demonstrated no visible effect when Sarah accused him of infidelity.

At the close of the session, the issues were summarized using themes that came up during the session. The couple agreed to meet a second time with the expectation that they would complete the Keirsey Personality Type Sorter (Keirsey, 1998) before the next session. The intent was to gain insight into areas of consideration that would contribute to further conflict or assist in harmonizing the two lives.

Session Two – Setting Goals and Expectations

Setting of goals and expectations was restricted to focus on the things that could be accomplished during this session. All parties worked on establishing three goals that would be accomplished during the session. The focus was on short-term goals since the nature of the relationship was in flux. Three goals were outlined:

1. To have a clearer sense of what they are going to do with the relationship.
2. To see whether there was anything that could be done to change their minds (Sarah's ambivalence/Andrew disinterest).

3. The ability to move on “beyond this situation.” (Sarah wants her life back/Andrew wants to give her what she wants).

It appeared that both parties were somewhat resolved that the relationship was ending and that meeting in counseling was an amicable way of making the decision known to each other. An attempt was made to address the longevity of the relationship indirectly by addressing the issue of self-identity. It was hoped that repairing a sense of self would improve the probability of working on the relationship.

The Type Sorters tool were used to give insight to each of the uniqueness of their personality types and the challenges that their uniqueness generates. It was hoped that by knowing their strengths and weaknesses, that knowledge would facilitate reflection and insight to enhance both self-identity and self-worth.

Results of Type Sorter done in session and the Temperament Sorters done at home. Andrew scored as a rational, introverted/reserved, intuitive/introspective, thinking/toughminded, judging/scheduling (INTJ). Keirsey (1998) classified this type as “The Mastermind”. He noted that masterminds want harmony and order in their homes. They desire a spouse who is independent and has a strong personality. It was also noted that in courtship, the selection of a spouse for the mastermind is a rational process. It is intended to fit a mental list of physical and intellectual attributes. The mastermind is reported by Keirsey (1998) as being sometimes cold and calculated; they rely on the head and not on their heart in making courtship choices.

Sarah scored as a Guardian: extraverted/expressive, sensory/observant, feeling/friendly, judging/scheduling (ESFJ). Keirsey referred to this type as “The Provider”. Providers are sociable and supportive of those in need. They are serious about family care, conscious about home responsibility and have a strong sense of values. The provider is said to be loyal and loving,

committed to the success of the relationship, devoted to the children of the relationship and is somewhat emotionally tied to the children's success or failures.

Both individuals were informed of their dominant traits and primary attributes as listed in the Keirsey Type Sorter.

Andrew was informed of his communication style as being abstract and utilitarian in his outlook. This was contrasted with Sarah; whose primary mode of communication was concrete and cooperative in the implementation of objectives. They were allowed to consider their attempts at addressing the issues that affected their relationship in light of their dominant communication styles. A discussion followed using the Gestalt focus on the "now," about what each was thinking and feeling at the moment. Sarah noted that she was never able to get through to Andrew who spent most of his time at home watching television and doing nothing.

Sarah was asked to focus on what she was feeling and thinking now about her memories of the struggles. She noted that she is still frustrated and disappointed in herself. Her disappointment was based on the fact that she returned to the relationship when she should have gone on with her life after the first separation. She spoke of her decision as a waste of her time. She felt disappointed. She was asked how the feeling of disappointment was influencing her at the moment. She stated that she felt angry with herself and wanted to walk away "from it all."

Andrew was asked what he was thinking and feeling at the moment. Andrew noted that he just wanted to get over with it. When asked about his feelings, he stated that he did not feel any way, "good or bad" about it. His frequent response carried the idea of giving Sarah what she wants. Andrew clarified that his response was independent of Sarah's comments.

Andrew and Sarah were informed of certain traits regarding the Sorter Type findings with the hope of bringing out each other's strength and working at the possibility of a reflective and

redeeming outcome. It was assumed that if each sees greater value in each other, there would be the possibility of embracing the virtues of forgiveness, mercy, and grace to reconstruct a redemptive relationship.

Sarah was said to have attributes of a provider, reliable, respectable, dutiful, socializer, and helpmate. Andrew was noted to possess attributes, such as strategist, ingenious, strong-willed, and pragmatic. Attempting to highlight possibilities of compatibility by noting virtues proved to be unsuccessful as issues of distrust raised by Sarah continued to negate the process.

Trust appeared to be essential to the relationship. However, the need to move beyond the hurt and wrong to embrace a forgiving and redemptive spirit appeared essential to that outcome. Both individuals did not seem willing to work towards any measure of reconciliation.

Andrew and Sarah presented the need for the third objective of their goals; the ability to move beyond this situation. It was agreed that the next meeting's discussion would focus on the nature of the relationship and forging an amicable outcome beyond the current situation. Both were given the thought analysis template used in CBT (in the appendix B) to be filled out for the next meeting. The homework was to contrast the pros and cons of being together or having a time of separation. The notion of scripture regarding agreed separation in 2 Corinthians 7 was expressed as a preliminary alternative to divorce.

Session Three

The session opened with the exploration of the previous attempt at reconciliation. Sarah noted that Andrew stated that he was finished with the extramarital affairs and that she was willing to work at the relationship again. It was stated that she thought that he loved her but added that she made a fool of herself.

Andrew made known that he had always loved her and that was why he married her. Sarah attempted to interrupt but was asked to consider the details of the contract where each person should have their time to share their thoughts uninterrupted by the other.

Andrew went on to note that the persons he was speaking to were friends that he knew from childhood and that they have kept in communication. He denied any measure of intimacy, limiting his interaction to conversations on the phone. He referred to Sarah in the third person as “she” and was not using any terms of endearment.

Sarah insisted that Andrew did more than talk and was visibly shaken by his denial. She added that they were all lies and that she was tired of all the lies. She stated that he has been chasing after women and had neglected her and the children. She added that he was not a father to their children nor a husband to her. She contended that she had been paying all the bills and that he contributed little or nothing towards the expenses.

The idea of forgiveness was introduced as a measure of substitutionary sacrifice liberating both Sarah and Andrew. Sarah from the feelings of anguish and animosity and towards Andrew for what he had supposedly done, as forgiveness is self-affirming.

Sarah raised the question of the logic of forgiving someone who does not admit having done wrong. Sarah was informed that the act of forgiveness was also meant for her in regaining her sense of identity and worth and affirming her sense of personhood. It was noted that extending forgiveness was an act of cleansing herself of toxic feelings such as animosity, hatred, unforgiveness, and incorporating a gracious and free spirit.

Sarah’s silence revealed a measure of contemplation. Having asked of her to forgive, Sarah appeared disarmed and reflective.

Andrew being asked what it would mean to him if Sarah were to extend forgiveness, Andrew noted that this was what Christians do. He was asked to respond to the question about what it would mean to him. He did not give a verbal response.

Andrew was asked what it would mean to a person who had done him wrong if he was to forgive that person. The intent was to objectify the response to gain insight into Andrew's idea of forgiveness. Andrew noted that he would not hold the wrong against the person and that the person would be free to move on.

The idea of substitutionary sacrifice was explained as the person who forgives taking on the cost of the offense while releasing the other of the consequence. It is the act of not seeking retribution or revenge and acting as if the debt has been paid. The message of the gospel with emphasis on the substitutionary sacrifice of Christ was introduced to appeal to their faith.

This was a cathartic moment when both individuals were somewhat confronted by self-realization. The subject of forgiveness seemed critical to the reconstruction of self-identity, self-worth and self-affirmation. Unforgiveness vilifies the individual's sense of self with negating emotions. It victimizes the individual's perception and thereby obstructs wholesome relationships.

The dialogue continued on the subject of forgiveness and reconstruction of the individual self. The session ended with Sarah unable to voice her desire to forgive and Andrew not willing to ask for forgiveness.

Both were asked to think through the process of liberating themselves – Sarah to free herself from her negative emotions and Andrew to free himself from the negative consequences.

The thought analysis results were not discussed at this session. They were tabled for the next meeting.

Session Four

Sarah came in alone stating that she had filed a restraining order against Andrew and had called the police to have him leave the house. She brought in copies of the documents indicating that Andrew was not to be less than 100 yards from her.

She also stated that her son was in counseling. Sarah alleged that her son had a knife when he came into her room recently, and she called the police who called the (Boston Emergency Service Team (BEST). She was fearful that her son intended to harm her. Her son was hospitalized, assessed, and subsequently released. He reportedly did not present as being homicidal and was not assessed to be suicidal.

Sarah disclosed that she locks her bedroom door at nights. She also reported that Andrew once came into her room and she woke up to find him holding a rope in his hand. She stated that she took out a restraining order against him for fear that her life might be in danger. Sarah and Andrew separated. Sarah intended to file divorce proceedings.

The older children reportedly moved out of the house after a confrontation with Sarah who assumed that they were siding with their father, Andrew. Sarah is presently alone in the house with her son. The restraining order was in place. She hoped to extend it for a year, and within that time, she was filing for a divorce.

The question of safety was raised. Sarah stated that she felt safe when she locked her room and felt that by going to counseling, her son would get the help that he needed. When she was asked for the older children, Sarah stated that they were adults and had to live their own lives.

The disclosure and recent events changed the objectives of the sessions. The intent changed to strengthening Sarah, reconstructing her self-identity beyond the relationship, enhancing her self-worth beyond the assumed failure, and having her affirm herself in living a

meaningful life. He was reminded that self-affirmation and self-actualization are made evident in power to forgive.

Sarah articulated her sexual frustration by noting that Andrew's intent was only to use her. She stated that he once engaged in kissing her when he had an abscess in his mouth. She stated that she was a virgin when she met him and had kept herself until they were married. She spoke of him as the only man that she has had sex with and that she has wasted her whole life. Sarah expressed her hatred for Andrew.

Sarah was led to consider exercising forgiveness primarily to release herself from the emotions that taunted her spirit and that prevented her from becoming the person who she was meant to be. Forgiveness was discussed as letting the offense go, releasing the hurt and incorporating goodness and kindness to replace those negative emotions.

Sarah was introduced to the empty chair technique of Gestalt to get rid of the distorted thought. She was given a chair and asked to envision Andrew sitting on the other. She was asked to recall all the images that hurt her and release them by stating that "for all that you have done to me I forgive you." She did the exercise.

Sarah was asked to sit with the hurt and with the techniques of deep breathing and flexing and relaxing her muscles. At each moment of relaxation, she was asked to release the hurt and pain.

Sarah was asked to center herself and deeply consider herself embracing a measure of peace, wholeness, kindness, goodness, and love. It was hoped that the exercises would foster a sense of affirmation that would lead to genuine expressions of personhood.

Sarah agreed to return to discuss how she would manage and cope with the challenges ahead. Sarah was given the book “Happiness is an inside job” by John Powell (1989) to read before the next session.

Session Five

Self-determination and self-efficacy incorporate the ideals of taking charge of one’s destiny with the use of sound and informed judgment.

Sarah had filed for divorce. She felt better about herself and seemed focused on making meaning of her situation. She came to terms with the fact that she is single again and stopped wearing the wedding ring. She made light of the idea of being available and hoped that a good man would come along.

Sarah was asked to consider the steps she needed to take to reconstruct herself as a wholesome individual. She asked what her priority would be in making this happen. Sarah stated that she wanted to focus on herself. She stated that she had focused on the hurt so much that she lost her joy and laughter.

She was asked what she received from reading the book by John Powell, Sarah noted that she learned a lot. She mentioned that love must include certain things and exclude certain things and that she needed to stretch outside her comfort zone. Further discussion revealed that moving out of the relationship was like moving out of her comfort zone because the relationship had defined her. She now has to redefine herself and find herself. She spoke of being a woman again.

It was expressed that the first step was for Sarah to find out who she was, beyond the relationship and to forge a new identity. She took pride in saying that she is now called by her maiden name and has changed the name in all places.

Sarah was challenged to consider developing coping skills to deal with the challenges ahead and cautioned about seeking immediate comfort to compensate for the loss of a relationship.

Concerns about self-worth were noted as the implications that a failed relationship might cause her to think less of herself. Addressing the possibility of degrading thoughts, Sarah was asked to reaffirm to herself that she was more than the single experience of a failed relationship and that she has the resources necessary to seek a better outcome for herself.

The session was used to address issues that would negatively affect areas of identity, worth, and affirmation. Each of these issues were raised and countered by a positive alternative perspective.

Session Six

Sarah came once more. Her son continued to go to counseling as he was once hospitalized for voicing suicidal ideas and threats to harm himself. He remains emotionally stable though notably silent. Sarah was gainfully employed and has a significant female friend that she has reconnected with. She noted that Andrew was never pleased with her talking to her previous friends and that she was now reconnected. She attended church regularly and was seeking to be involved but questioned whether she would be accepted because of her divorce.

Sarah remained invested in her son. She thought of herself as able to invest in him and wanted to keep him from becoming like his father. She was still concerned about his mental health and believes that the divorce continued to affect him. Sarah remained cautious about entertaining any relationship though there were people who had voiced their interest in her.

Sarah was asked what brought her to the point where she could decide to separate when she did. Sarah stated that the personality exercise (Keirsey Type Sorter) made her realize that she

was a much better person than how she was made to feel about herself and that Andrew, though different, would continue to be conflictual if he did not change his behavior. She stated that his unwillingness to take responsibility for his actions was also problematic. She commented that she deserved better. She felt the relief of being free.

Case Reflection

The following is a reflection on the case in an attempt to arrive at an amicable resolution. Whereas both individuals were set in their minds regarding the expected outcome, the relationship and individual growth beyond the current condition needed to be addressed. The following are core principles that guided the therapeutic objectives beyond separation.

“To Love Your Neighbor as Yourself”

The relationship between Andrew and Sarah was in a difficult situation with Andrew showing a measure of disinterest and Sarah questioning whether it was in her best interest to remain in the relationship. With the relationship at a standstill and the marriage in question, the intent was to work primarily on the individuals, leaving the marriage as a secondary concern.

The process was to use the premise of unconditional commitment to strengthen the individuals and develop coping virtues that whether they remain together or separate, they both could continue mended lives, thereby, limiting the mental and emotional anguish that follows divorce. Both individuals were seen separately; Andrew, informally, and Sarah in formal sessions. The intent was to work with each to develop a positive sense of self-identity and self-worth apart from the relationship, delegate resources towards self-affirmation and self-actualization beyond the confines of the relationship. It also meant to utilize resources toward self-determination and self-efficacy regardless of the outcome of the marriage. These are considered three tenets of a therapeutic approach based on the reconstruction of love as unconditional commitment.

Self-identity and self-worth.

Both Andrew and Sarah were led to discuss the residue of emotions that would result from the broken relationship, the issues of trust, and the sense of failure. The subjects of blame and shame were discussed in the light of the pending discussion of self-affirmation. Exploring the

content of the mind (Romans 12:2) by addressing distorted thoughts with the use of cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) was part of the exercise to reconstruct a positive self-identity and enhance self-worth. That transformation was necessary for the next stage of development.

The varied theories of psychotherapy stand on the premise that human beings are at times dysfunctional due to negating influences that generate distorted thinking and maladaptive behaviors (Hemfelt, Minirth, Meier 1989; Yerkovich, 2006; Young, Klosko, & Weisharr, 2003). The thrust of therapeutic practices is to facilitate adjustments that reflect reality and retain a measure of balance in one's living circumstance. The negating influence, distorted perception, and the resulting dysfunctional maladaptive behaviors act as filters that often impact the act of loving. The imperfections of the human psyche render it impossible to love with a measure of perfection except when such love is facilitated through divine perfection.

It leaves one to conclude that to love oneself and to love one's neighbor, one's self-awareness must be altered or rather restored to reflect that of a redeemed self, cleansed from the contaminants of a degenerate life. As noted, before, when a dysfunctional self seeks to love another, both the lover and the loved are subjected to the experience and expression of impurities that then distort the attitude towards and the act of loving. In loving oneself then, the self, being then both the subject and object of love, can only experience and consequently express genuine love through the mediation of divinity. To truly love oneself, one is restored to the likeness of the regenerated self. Both Sarah and Andrew were led to understand the contributions they both made to the deteriorating condition of their relationship with the need to reconstruct a renewed sense of self – not perfect but progressive. Their negative contributions were contrasted with the effect of positive possibilities to highlight the supposed outcome of each choice. The idea of love as a one-directional thrust was discussed to underline unconditional commitment as an alternate routine.

Love is a commitment that is one-directional in its initiative, sacrificial in nature, and salvific in its outcome. It is founded on sacrifice as it gives of itself for the benefit of the object loved, though motivated by the determination of its own benevolent thrust towards self-expression.

To love and be loved are two nuances of a one-directional experience as it relates to giving and receiving in the act of reciprocity. In the act of interpersonal love, both lovers are givers and receivers simultaneously. Reciprocity does not determine the decision to love though it enriches it. Love has both a primary and secondary notion: to love and be loved. The primary notion of loving is the commitment of oneself to the improvement of another's welfare. As such it is self-efficacious but self-denying. It commits itself and its resources, its capacity to endure and the ability to overcome to work towards the benefit of another. In light of love's commitment, it is initially sacrificial with the intent that in valuing others, it serves vicariously to the satisfaction of the object being loved. The secondary notion of loving is to be loved. To be loved is to be so impacted as to embrace that same commitment by internalizing the characteristic of the love experienced. To be loved in this secondary sense is to be the recipient of the primary expression of another's love. Love then has to be internalized before it can be externalized as a life's expression.

Individuals struggle for self-worth, self-significance, security, and meaning both by internal content and within an external context. The internalized content, both conscious and subconscious, influence perception and determine behavior within the external context of human interactions. The individual battles within the bipolar range of duality, reality or illusion, fact or fiction, to sometimes create within its own mind a world of existence that becomes a self-made existential reality. And, to that individual, its creation becomes its accepted reality. King (1985) wrote that "hatred and bitterness can never cure the disease of fear; only love can do that. Hatred

paralyzes life; love releases it. Hatred confuses life; love harmonizes it. Hatred darkens life; love illuminates it” (p.122). Life is filled with content that unconsciously distorts the conscious expressions of the human potential. For Sarah and Andrew to move forward, both need to re-educate themselves with core beliefs that contribute to wholesome living.

Intervention: rebuilding self-esteem to enhance self-worth.

At the beginning of the therapeutic experience, Sarah and Andrew were asked to consider the impact their lives and decisions would have on the children. With Sarah expressing frustration at the fruitless attempts to maintain an amicable relationship and the constant conflicts within the family system, it was agreed upon that a family meeting be conducted with the children. The aim of the family meeting would be to discuss what it would take to reconstruct a nurturing environment within the family system where each member could be valued and validated. Sarah at first appeared resistant to the idea but faced with the possibility of the emotional and mental consequence of the separation, she agreed to have a family meeting. A few ground rules were suggested such. Each member would be allowed to state what they would consider to be a healthy family environment, share things that needed to be addressed, identify practices and expectations that seemed problematic. It was also suggested that there should be no blaming, no shaming, and no defensive response during sharing. Thoughts were to be written down and then discussed to conclude with an action plan for reconstructing a nurturing family environment.

Report of the meeting indicated that it was difficult for the adults to be placed in a position where they were subjected to the children’s observations and criticisms without rebuttals. Each felt valued when their voices were allowed to be heard. There were mixed messages between the two adults towards the children. Some concerns were raised requiring Andrew’s need to communicate and interact more with the children and be more encouraging rather than

complaining. Andrew highlighted his frustration in being blamed for the dysfunction in the home and spoke of his several attempts at interaction that was met with silence by other family members. Sarah reported that she had been the one seeking to instill positive values in the lives of the children with little support from Andrew. Sarah maintained that she could raise the children alone and with a more positive outcome that would not include Andrew's presence and direct influence. The children were indecisive about the idea of separation. Both adults felt valued by the children, though they both continued to struggle at valuing and validating each other. The situation in which the youngest child was recently hospitalized due to suicide ideation complicated the matter. It caused Sarah to take on the stance of a protector with the willingness to take responsibility for the outcome if the worst-case scenario occurred. Sarah expressed hopelessness of any positive outcome if the family remained together. Andrew remained ambivalent.

To enhance self-esteem, each was asked to consider the strengths and skill-sets that each brings to the family system. Sarah spoke of her concerns about the tidiness of the house, the children doing their chores, their school work and the need to maintain an organized system. Andrew acknowledged his contribution as a provider and a balancing alternative to Sarah's hardline discipline. Andrew saw himself as the family's anchor. Sarah spoke of herself as the one assisting the children to become responsible adults. Each was brought to understand their unique contribution and to view such uniqueness as validation of distinct individual value and worth.

Self-affirmation and self-actualization.

The necessity of love is evident in its ability to transform lives. A transformed life is an affirmed life. Love transforms and reforms in stages through the catalyst of an interpersonal relationship. Within the social matrix of human interaction, four stages were considered applicable to effect transformation: confession, connection, conversion, and courage. The process begins

with self-realization and the need for transformation with a movement towards self-actualization and self-affirmation. This served as the therapeutic process and stages of development. While they were being seen individually (though for Andrew it was less frequent), the attempt was to have Sarah and Andrew move beyond affirmation to become confidently expressive, knowing that their contributions were unique and valued. But, such a movement required the rite of passage from confession to connection, and conversion with courage. Confession has both the inward realization of contributing factors to the dysfunction and an interpersonal expression of such reality. The connection is the social interaction that provides the humane environment for a positive change of conversion. This is the conversion that incorporates changes necessary for a healthy reconstruction of self beyond separation. To accomplish this change, the courage to endure the process of transformation is an indispensable virtue.

A confession that is forged out of self-realization. Andrew and Sarah needed to forgive to free themselves from the burden of guilt and shame – Andrew for the acts that he had done and Sarah for the emotional hurt that she was carrying. Learning to forgive was facilitated by exploring the Christian faith and its belief in light of the sacrificial death of Christ. Confession as an admission of culpability is preliminary and pertinent to the act of forgiveness.

The goal of treatment by catharsis is full confession not merely intellectual acknowledgment of the facts, but confirmation by the heart and the actual release of the suppressed emotions (Jung, 2011). It is the practice of all psychotherapeutic intervention to bring one to the consciousness of their condition and need before effective outcomes can be achieved. As in the practice of psychoanalysis and psychodynamic theories, the tendency is to achieve a measure of self-realization through a series of questions to come to the point where conflict could be realized, and a measure of balance achieved.

Confession at this point is not so much an outspoken admission of guilt or shame but rather an acknowledgement on one level, and acceptance on the other, of one's dysfunctional conditioning. This requires both the act of taking responsibility and exercising accountability. The self, to begin the conscious journey to restoration, has to commence with the confession that is borne out of self-realization. It is the realization that preconditioned dispositions often cause misdeeds. It is a confession of dispositions that bring a degree of culpability. When culpability is acknowledged, one is left to take responsibility. Taking responsibility for actions resulting from misperception produces the need that facilitates forgiveness: to be forgiven by others and to forgive oneself. It is a predisposition to forgive that makes love a strong factor in the act of restoration.

In forgiving, the sacrificial aspect of love becomes a primary necessity. The sacrifice assumes the payment of the debt thereby releasing the debtor from the obligation of such culpability. It is by the sacrifice that the debtor is released of the debt while the one sacrificing assumes responsibility. When the debt is thereby absorbed by sacrifice, the debtor is absolved of such charges and in some measure, is presently released to a new beginning without the negating burden of the past. It is then that the one assuming the debt by sacrifice has the power to forgive the one for whom the debt has been acquired through such a sacrifice. The sacrificial aspect of love gives legitimacy to the act of forgiveness. It is an act of justice where one is acquitted vicariously through another's payment. Love engages forgiveness and justice sacrificially.

It is in this vein that the scripture admonishes that one should "owe no man anything but to love one another" (Romans 13:8) and that we must "bear one another's burdens" (Galatians 6:2). It is in the predisposition to love that we are to begin a life relationship with a deficit acquired by the sacrifice encapsulated in love. The sacrifice assumes culpability. When through forgiveness, responsibility is acknowledged, the burden of guilt and shame is relieved. However,

the forgiveness that follows in reversing the debt and releasing the former debtor required a ransom. By virtue of the sacrifice, another has taken on the debt of the former debtor. In forgiveness, the one forgiving absorbs and absolves the debt of the one being forgiven.

The sacrifice of love is vicarious. Love's sacrifice bears another's burden when the vulnerable unknowing child or the misinformed dysfunctional adult is addressed with the sacrifice borne out of a well-informed mind committed to the benefit of the object loved. To the destitute and deprived, love finds its relevance. To this end, love is a necessity, love sacrifices that another might live. The acknowledgment that individuals are imperfect universalizes culpability and thereby generalizes responsibility. When culpability and responsibility are assumed, forgiveness becomes transformational.

The other aspect of confession that is forged out of self-realization is a transformation that leads to restoration. Love facilitates supportive outcomes in the form of transformation and restoration. As the sacrifice of love acquires the debt, thereby, forgiving and releasing the former debtor, love also provides the one forgiven an opportunity for a new beginning. Love not only absolves the debt by sacrifice, but love is also predisposed to utilize its resources to enhance the life of another. This is the essence of the "living" in the phrase "living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). It dies but lives through the life of another.

In that act of loving, both Andrew and Sarah were led to release each other of the personal charges levied against each other, giving each other an assumed freedom. That freedom serves as an act of self-affirmation that facilitates self-actualization. It is in the act of forgiving that one first expresses unconditional love towards oneself and releases oneself from the hatred and animosity that cripple and contaminate the attempt at self-actualization.

What of loving oneself, one may ask? For in the course of life's effort at forgiving others, one has also to learn to forgive oneself. In scripture, it is spoken of as being "a living sacrifice" (Romans 12:1). A living sacrifice could be translated as *a living dead* and that in itself is an existential aspect of loving oneself. The admonitions to "deny oneself" (Matthew 16:24) and to "take up one's cross" (Matthew 16:24) carry the same notion of this existential reality. To love oneself is to place self at the altar of sacrifice, confessing and forgiving. It is an admission of culpability that leads to an acquittal from guilt and shame.

To love oneself, one must in some measure be both subject and object at once; the subject loving and the object being loved. To forgive oneself, one must be existentially both the sacrifice that represents and the subject that is being represented at the same instance. Love forgives. Likewise, to forgive oneself one must become both the object of the subject (the offended) and then too become the subject of the object (the offender); being both the burden and the burden-bearer at once, the one who is offended and the one who forgives.

If one must forgive oneself, one needs to become both the bearer of the debt and also the sacrifice and satisfaction for the debt being paid. The sacrifice is disposed of on behalf of another, and in this sense, self-assumed responsibility for the debt owed by self and gives itself as payment for that debt. This is the premise of self-denial. To deny oneself is to abdicate sovereign ownership and all rights to noble entitlements. To die to self is self-abdication. In becoming culpable paying for its own debt through self-sacrifice, the self seemingly grants itself the power and privilege to forgive itself and thereby releasing itself through sacrifice. By this act self dies, only to live in the newly granted freedom of a forgiven life. It is there in forgiveness that it "rises in the newness of life"; and in the notion of taking up the cross, it retains the consciousness of being dead while living – the living sacrifice. The living sacrifice occurs when self becomes an object to itself and

a recipient of its own sacrificial investment for the betterment of itself. The Apostle Paul captured the depth of the meaning of such duality when he said, “I die daily” (1 Corinthians 15:31). As a *subject* of itself, self dies to live; as an *object* of itself, self lives to die, while living self bears the cross, the consciousness of death. Without love, self is condemned to being devoid of the freedom of life. With love’s sacrifice and support, self dies vicariously but lives victoriously with its debt absorbed and absolved. Love restores as it transforms and makes its object socially acceptable.

Both Andrew and Sarah needed to embrace the cross of sacrifice while seeking the newness of life beyond the broken relationship. Connection to Christ facilitates a resurrection that makes living meaningful and gives hope for the future. Andrew and Sarah were led to think of life beyond the marriage in light of the resurrection and thoughts of redemption.

Both Sarah and Andrew were given the exercise to list five things that they thought contributed to the dysfunction, identifying negating things that they were directly or indirectly responsible for. They were asked to then list them in order of seriousness. Andrew’s primary issue was the question of infidelity. He did not admit to it but noted that the thought of infidelity was a major concern to the dysfunction. Sarah noted that her inability to forgive and the feeling of constant pain were her most serious contributing factors. Confession is intended to lead to forgiveness and the releasing of the pain that suggest punitive consequences.

The connection that fosters self-absolution. Jung (2011) likened the therapeutic dyad as the meeting of two personalities like the contact of two chemical substances, noting that if there is any reaction, both are transformed. In the Jung’s practice, the therapist serves the purpose of aiding consciousness into the interactive moment. All therapeutic interventions seemed to involve the presence of the one whose interaction serves to facilitate change. In most cases, it is the

therapist who serves that purpose. However, the general idea is that the individual's encounter with another individual assists in facilitating change in the lives of each person involved.

This interaction serves as a catalyst between two entities that generate awareness intended to resolve polarized conflicts. All theories of psychotherapy, regardless of orientation, carry that same cognitive component. Regardless of whether the emphasis is on behavior modification, cognitive realization, narrative enrichment, early childhood or life-long developmental concerns, the cognitive component of a connection that aids consciousness is evident. The individual is expected to assume a degree of personal responsibility and encouraged to assume increasing accountability for thoughts, feelings, sensations as emerging feelings and thoughts are brought into awareness. Conflicts are psychosocial polarizations.

Conflicts need to be realized while working towards the desired solution. The external difficulties are indicative of unresolved internalized tensions. The cognitive and emotional conflicts of two opposing tensions within the individual generate an imbalance that may manifest in cognitive, emotional or physical symptoms. They are sometimes brought about by misperception informed by maladaptive experiences. Conditioned by personal experiences, without insightful intervention, the attempts at resolutions only worsen the condition by the reinforcement of established maladaptive behavior patterns. Love seeks to establish a relationship connection that facilitates freeing oneself from these maladaptive patterns.

The nurturance of love to connect with the standard of ideal influence becomes critical in arriving at conflict resolution. With its twin component of sacrifice and redemption and when well informed, love serves to mirror and model the unconditional positive regard of Rogers (1980) as a basis for acceptance and support. This is done regardless of the person's disclosures, with the intent of leading the individual to accept and take responsibility for themselves. Love persists in

providing personal resources in an attempt to arrive at the desired outcome in harmony with the individuals' life objectives.

Love embraces conflict in its attempt to forge out a harmonious balance that makes life manageable and meaningful. From the consciousness of polarizing conflicts, this integration towards the desired harmony, enabled by love, serves as a conversion that is transformational.

At this moment, Andrew was not responding to calls or visits. Sarah was the primary person involved in the conversation. Work around Sarah's reconstruction of self and releasing the pain and trauma of past experiences was done. Sarah was taken through the exercise of drafting out a plan indicating what she would like to see her life look like with workable steps to achieving her goals. The Acronym SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound) was used to set her goals, and the 6S's (Ramasamy, 2004; Makato Investments, 2014) model of efficiency was applied to refine her steps to achieving her goals (see index). The 6S model involves working on an action plan that requires her to utilize the following categories; study/sort, streamline/straighten, simplify/shine, standardize, synergize/sustain, and strengthen/safety. Sarah worked through the exercise and refined her steps to focus on her development. She was encouraged to identify issues of concerns, sort and prioritize them, focus on those that would enrich her life, engage resources and develop a plan of action to reestablish herself beyond her brokenness.

Conversion that facilitates self-transformation. The conversion to a new perspective and subsequent workout of the new perspective makes self-transformation a continual process. It continually transcends self in integrating insight and awareness and translates them into action and habits. The acquisition of pertinent and practical information provides the basis for a well-informed response to varied situations.

Change is continuously challenging as change is self-transcending. Change invokes anxiety, yet with the transforming mind there is hope of resurrection and newness. Anxiety evokes the fear of death and destruction. As change incorporates something new, the old must become obsolete for the new to be established. Conversion is necessary. With conversion comes the sense of loss and the anxiety that is provoked by the unfamiliar. It is there that the courage to love becomes relevant, in spite of the threat of non-being.

Individuals are often resistant and reluctant to change for it often requires the death of the old to accept the life of the new. It is a well-known dictum that “unless a kernel of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed. But if it dies, it produces many seeds” (John 12:24). As in every struggle, to submit oneself to the angst of the unknown with the hope of acquiring life is often steeped in anxiety. It is the fear of defeat when confronted with the realization of inadequate resources, which causes the disturbance of the mind. Fear is made real when one perceives that the challenge that is imminently forthcoming seems greater than the resources that are present. Courage embraces fear and employs the virtues of faith, hope and love in its movement towards self-actualization. It is that conversion from fear to faith that is self-transforming. Change is self-transforming. The courage to change confronts the anxiety that change induces. Change requires courage to move from the anxiety induced by fear to the assurance inspired by faith in its movement towards self-transformation and self-actualization.

Courage that results in self-actualization. Tillich (1952) stated that “courage is self-affirming, ‘in spite of’, that is in spite of that which tends to prevent the self from affirming itself” (p.32). Self-actualization is the essence of self-affirmation. It is only as the potential is actualized that life is affirmed. Potential that is not realized is a measure of self-adjudication. Potential that

is not actualized is a degree of self-denial. However, potential that is actualized is a form of courage, which is the impetus of self-actualization.

The thrust towards self-affirmation is faced with the threat of self-depreciation, which may be derived from life experiences especially when faced with a love that is misinformed. To face the challenges of life and the struggle towards meaningful existence, one needs courage without which life slips into perceived devaluation.

Strength and value are introduced by Tillich (1952) to underscore the meaning of courage. The one bearing this virtue is said to be the bearer of high values with the ultimate test of a readiness to sacrifice oneself for them. Self-actualization is virtuous in its affirmation as it brings one to his/her ultimate expression of self – congruent, authentic and transcending. Each moment of transformation needs to be perpetuated until another conflict occasions an opportunity at transcendence. It is a value-driven life. Life transcends to a new sphere of operation into the realm of the unknown. Courage seeks to engage virtue and, in the process, makes life meaningful. Living beyond the trauma of a broken relationship requires the courage that affirms life and instills value. Both Sarah and Andrew needed such affirmation with the courage to face the challenges of reconstructing a sense of self beyond brokenness. The challenge of working through the past and finding lessons for the future.

Intervention: Encouraging self-affirmation to enhance self-actualization.

Confession, connection, conversion, and courage were virtuous ideals that guided the attempt to move Sarah and Andrew through the process of forgiveness for self and each other. They needed the change and continuity in a movement towards a possible redemptive outcome.

Sarah and Andrew were committed to writing letters of forgiveness. This act allows the releasing and receiving forgiveness for both of them. A standardized letter was discussed and dictated with the following wording and signed by both. (See Appendix C).

The letter was forged out of the discussion regarding the spiritual mandate to, “forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us.” (Luke 11:4). The premise of forgiving is to be forgiven and to relieve oneself of any toxin that would inhabit and inhibit the human heart, thereby, negatively impacting the human spirit to love freely and purely. This process necessitated a change within the human mind, a conversion of spirit and the reconstruction of a redemptive relationship. Taking responsibility for one’s actions and admitting imperfections are acts of courage – to be authentic and genuine. Admitting vulnerability and culpability inspires humility and engenders compassionate responses to the human condition. With the enactment of a restraining order, arrangements needed to be made regarding child care and supervision for the youngest child. An arrangement was made through probate court.

Self-determination and self-efficacy.

The journey of love is an adventure in courage. It is the courage to embrace both death and life simultaneously - giving up while taking on. It exchanges one state of being for another with the willingness to continuously transcend by acknowledging and accepting a synthesis that is both unlike what it has been before, though retaining remnants of its former self. The transcendence into the unknown with the unfamiliar might be filled with anxiety and the fear of failure. Love provides the nexus, having with it both the authenticity of faith and genuineness of hope.

Faith, hope and love are three cardinal virtues with great religious sentiment. These three are so interconnected that each appears to rely on the others. True love embraces faith and hope with its sacrifice and support. Authentic faith engages both love and hope with its capacity to

endure and the ability to overcome. Genuine hope employs both faith and love with its confident expectation and joyous anticipation. Love as it sacrifices is an act of faith; love as it supports is an act of hope. Faith as it endures is an act of love; faith as it overcomes is an act of hope. Hope as it forecasts is an act of faith, and as it anticipates is an act of love. Love is the sacrifice that redeems and the support that restores with faith that endures and hope that anticipates new beginnings. Love is essentially necessary for personal development, social engagement and the movement towards self-actualization that are both authentic and congruent. Love is courageous as it is virtuous, it is transformative and restorative. It makes life continuously transcendent. Andrew and Sarah were challenged to accommodate the following three dispositions in their lives. These dispositions were informed by conflict arising out of their personality types, role expectations and lifelong habits that they both contributed to. They were challenged to engage an educated love that is informed by known facts and inspired by their Christian faith – to learn, to live, and to love.

A predisposition to learn - love must be informed and inspired. It has been said that one of Socrates's well-known phrase was, know oneself. Having knowledge of self is important to the act of loving. Self-understanding and self-acceptance build self-awareness and self-confidence. As in the concept of high content previously mentioned, the more one knows of oneself, the greater ability to act with increased confidence.

The quest to know oneself could become a tremendous challenge as the findings will include the knowledge of both weaknesses and strengths. Powell (1976) stated that "The one thing we cannot do – and it is the one thing that every human must do to be fully alive – is accept ourselves as we are". He outlined five essentials steps to self-acceptance and becoming fully

human: to accept oneself, to be oneself, to lose oneself in loving, to believe, and to belong (p.14-15). Learning to love must be grounding in one's attempt at learning to live as oneself.

To know oneself one has to look beyond the defenses that have been developed as coping mechanisms. Freud and other psychodynamic theorists have noted that as a reaction to childhood deficiencies, human beings make coping adjustments that are often called defenses. These act as functioning adjustments on one hand and psychological filters on the other. Berzoff, et al. (2002) speak of the development of these defenses as an attempt of the ego to protect the self from conflicts that signal danger within and without the individual. It was their opinion that:

When faced with one or more such dangers the ego uses defense mechanisms to protect the self. Defense mechanisms automatically and unconsciously modify the individual's perception of and or reactions to danger... Every defense mechanism is designed to keep unconscious content from entering conscious awareness (p. 79).

While the defenses are meant to be coping mechanisms, they do interfere with reality testing, and, at times, become maladaptive responses to life challenges. These defenses also serve to obscure the clarity of self-awareness as they keep the unconscious contents from entering conscious awareness. Furthermore, in learning, obstacles misinform.

Self-awareness is the psychological foundation upon which the twin traits of responsibility and accountability are built. Rooted in the history of one's development, self-identity as the by-product of self-awareness, finds itself rooted in lessons learned from the nestled beginnings in the family of origin. McNeil (2006) affirmed that "We learn our first lessons in our family of origin, then we spend the rest of our lives either building on these lessons or trying to overcome them" (p.15). Yerkovich (2006) refer to these lessons as "imprints" that are like dance lessons influencing

our love styles. Yerkovich (2006) speaks of the imprints as recognizable and predictable patterns, that when known, could be the key to successful relationships.

Having a sense of self is critical to forging interpersonal relationships but having an understanding as to how this self acts and reacts in certain circumstances is also essential to the success of any relationship. It is by knowing each other that couples become better at relating.

Self-awareness gives one the tools to understand his/her contribution to any relationship. It enables one to recognize the dynamics of intimacy with all its complexities. The attempt at knowing oneself is a challenging enterprise as it may, at times, require the difficult task of unearthing the suppressed and repressed imprints of early childhood experiences. Yerkovich (2006) stated that “we can never truly know our mate until we understand their childhood experiences” (p.24), but that is also true to each individual. One cannot truly know oneself until he/she understand his/her childhood experiences.

To encourage a desire to know more about herself, Sarah was given the task to write a profile of the man she would desire to be associated with. Sarah listed the following:

1. Must be older by about two to five years, taller than she is, Black, preferably of Caribbean heritage, single or has been divorced once.
2. He must be a Christian.
3. He must be honest and loyal and be someone she could trust.
4. He must be industrious and employed, and also willing to work at the relationship.
5. He must be faithful. She stated that this aspect of the relationship is non-negotiable.

In the discussion that follows, Sarah was asked about children. She noted that she would be willing to deal with children if he had one or two teenagers or adults. Sarah noted that at first, she just wanted to get married but after what she had gone through, she now has an idea of what

she wants in a relationship. She stated that the age of the person is now in consideration because she has found that she is better able to deal with men of her age who are from the Caribbean. She added that right now she is unable to trust any man totally and needs time to heal from the hurt. Work about mindfulness and assessing the present situation was done. She was led to focus on crafting a future that she is willing to create for herself. Getting herself together was her priority.

The following served as guidelines and themes used to assist Sarah in her quest towards getting herself together. She was led to understand the need for love to be incarnated. It was the idea that individuals live what they learn. It was also noted that observing the family history, family of origin, family dynamics, and the individual's developmental context are factors that assist in understanding one's potential and philosophy of love. Sarah was confronted with the challenges of getting to the point in her life where she develops a predisposition to love and a predisposition to life. It also meant that love has to be selective based on her profile and subservient to the ideal of sacrificial and redemptive living.

A predisposition to love - love must be illustrated and incarnated. Love must be inspired and informed for love to be significantly meaningful, however, to be existentially viable, love must be illustrated and incarnate. Two questions need to be asked in reference to the one loving and the one being loved. Having the resources necessary to meet the needs of another is a declaration of one's ability, and the extent to which one can endure the deficiencies of another is the determination of one's capacity. Both ability and capacity to love are necessary to determine the sustainability of any relationship. The first is determined by the resources of a well-informed mind and the second is based on whether the one loving has the capacity to love the other the way that individual needs to be loved. Love has to be intentional and informed to foster endearing relationships.

All human beings are conditioned to love and be loved. King (1963) stated that love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend. But this transformation requires that love must be illustrated in human flesh – an incarnate representation. Stemming from the act of God in Christ becoming flesh, God was in Christ humanizing love as a divine initiative. To the questions regarding what is love and how is love demonstrated, the incarnation of the Christ is God's indisputable response. From the process of thought to the spoken word, to becoming flesh, love became a divine expression and an existential reality, experienced and expressed in human flesh.

In the art of being illustrated, love finds genuine and authentic expression. Love's incarnation in human flesh is divine love illustrated within its corporeal context. Love finds itself confined in the experience of another. One cannot love that which one does not engage. Divine love engages humanity and seeks to participate in the need of humanity intimately. It is such participation that gives love its peculiar objective and vicarious vitality.

Vicarious vitality is the root of empathy. Empathy is the act of sincere affirmation that helps others appreciate their own goodness and giftedness. Powell (1969) believed that when people are truly affirmed, they come to life. Powell spoke of the subject-object encounter where "the other person becomes, in some mysterious and almost undefinable way, a special being in my eyes, a part of my world, and a part of my self. In so far as it is possible, I enter into the world of the other's reality" (p.41). This encounter is seen as an act of communication and the only avenue to communion.

The communion mentioned refers to bringing both the lover and the one being loved into a sense of intimate oneness of shared commonality. Stringfellow (1973) refers to this oneness in terms of incarnational theology that places "this world in the fullness of its fallen estate and

simultaneously disclosing the ecumenical, militant, triumphant presence of God” (p.41). It is, in fact, encountering the life of another in the fullness of its needs while simultaneously expressing the richness of love with its power to affirm and transform. However, in its incarnation and illustration, love must remain focused on desiring one thing, purity. Love must be pure. It is in the attempt at a sanctified lifestyle that love retains its authenticity and genuineness.

A predisposition to life - sacrificial loving and sanctified living. When agape love ceases to be pure, it ceases to be love. The Greek terms used for love, eros and philia. Could both be enacted with a measure of impurity and yet retain their designation? The immorality that is at times implicit in eros and the deception sometimes evident in philia do not deter from either being considered what they are. Both could entertain corruption and still be designated as love. Unlike these two, agape love cannot exist without purity. When agape love becomes corrupt, it ceases to be agape. Genuine and authentic love is at its highest level when purity defines it.

Love must be purely sacrificial in its giving, in that, it gives impartially. Love must be sanctified in its living in that it is totally committed to the wellbeing of the object loved. It is sanctified to the point that it is single-mindedly devoted to its outcome – sacrificial in its expression though salvific in its expectation.

Requesting that love be informed by knowledge, guided by wisdom, the writer to the Philippians (1:10) gave love its objectives by stating: "That you may approve things that are excellent; that you may be sincere and without offence until the day of Christ; being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God." Love must be both sincere and authentic approving the excellent, affirming the righteous, and resulting in the acceptable. Purity is to desire one thing, says Kierkegaard (1962). That one thing is to

desire the glory and praise of God in seeking the well-being of another. And, for this, faith, hope and love become the trinity of virtues in that one single act of a genuine expression.

As previously noted, love is said to be the greatest in contrast to faith and hope. However, love requires both of these in its operation at the human level. When the mind is unable to comprehend the intricacies and complexities of loving, faith rises to the occasion to believe in the possible outcome, with hope providing the vision of possibilities. As a result, love in sacrifice becomes a joyous experience. Faith is grounded in knowledge of justified true belief, and hope is anchored in the wisdom of promising outcomes. It is faith that gives love its motivation and hope keeps it in motion. Faith makes love's sacrifice vicarious, and hope makes salvation vital.

Agape love is a wholesome love, for it is inspired by God's presence, informed by God's word, and illustrated by God's promise in Christ. Agape embraces both faith and hope in any given moment of operation. On the human level, its expression lacks full comprehension and insight and, in some situations, can hurt while the intention was to help. It must be inspired to be essentially real and well-informed to be existentially relevant. In light of the divine, faith and hope are not attributes of God, for faith presumes a component of the unseen and hope presupposes an element of the unknown. In classical theology God knows all and sees all. God loves and is said to be love, as love engages all the attributes of God. God is wholly loving and love from God is fully informed and completely illustrated. God's love is perfect love. It is only to the measure that the human being is informed and totally surrendered to a godlike love that the human being loves perfectly.

Love must be sanctified. Love as an expression of the divine nature is pure both in content and intent. Love necessitates discipline in its expression and is determined in its expectation. Love

is pure to the point that it replicates divinity. It retains its purity to the extent to which it filters that which it incorporates and embraces.

Love as an expression of a sanctified life is love that is totally godly in its actions and is genuinely engaging to have as its outcome the resulting glory of God. Not only must love be pure in its expression but it has to carry with it the expectation of maintaining such purity in its outcome. Love disciplines as love disciples.

The intent of love's discipline is to structure constructive relationship outcomes that are redemptive and reconciliatory. In constructing redemptive relationship, love fosters both individual and social changes that enhance human interactions. Love serves to transform the individual's life trajectory thereby reconstructing social changes that are conducive to wholesome relationships. Individual graces are the features that influence communal living.

In love's attempt at transformation love endorses virtues that are representative of divine qualities. To this end love sanctions and structures, approving only that which serves its purpose. Love purposes human experiences that are representative of a divine encounter fostering the expression of goodly virtue. It serves "without dissimulation, abhors that which is evil, cleaves to that which is good" (Romans 12:9). It sanctions as it reconstructs, and reconstructs by requiring human responses of repentance, restitution and reconciliation.

Repentance

The expectation of love is to walk step by step in the truth that is acquired through honesty dispelling both ignorance and misinformation. Love remains pure to the extent that it is informed by truth – the accurate representation of reality. Self-deception is the denial of reality. Repentance presupposes acceptance of reality, acceptance of truth, and alignment to the truth. It is in reality the illumination of love informs life, eliminates darkness of ignorance and the shadows of

misrepresentation. It is the absence of the darkness and shadows of secrecy that facilitates endearing relationship intimacy. Such acceptance fosters forgiveness, and forgiveness liberates one from the penal consequence associated with the offence.

Repentance is the first step to amend a broken relationship. Love and its attributes must become one's true way of life. The unrepentant life is adversarial to the redemptive outcome of love. It perpetuates the painful realization of a betrayal that constantly retraumatizes the hurting party. An unrepentant lifestyle is a life of moral anarchy. Love requires intimacy, which flourishes where there is compassionate care. Authentic living means doing that which is right and morally acceptable. In reconstruction, trust and validating repentance are necessary.

Love requires repentance as a prelude to reconciliation. Love provides alternatives, as it is not willing that any should perish but all should repent (2 Peter 3:9). Repentance is the recapturing of an alternative lifestyle that is in harmony with the objectives of love. It is an alternative lifestyle that nurtures rather than diminishes human value and reconstructs relationships rather than destroy them. Repentance requires the acknowledgement of one living an unacceptable lifestyle, the abandonment of negating behavior and the commitment to act in a nurturing and nourishing manner. It is turning away from the wrong doing to embrace that which is right and just making one acceptable contribution to the enhancement of the relationship. In contributing to the enhancement of the relationship, after the initial act of repentance, individuals compensate by making amends in sometimes going above and beyond. Such is the act of restitution.

While Sarah initially sought such an action from Andrew, Andrew remained unrepentant and unwilling to make the necessary changes. With such an attitude and unwillingness to contribute positively to the betterment of the relationship, Sarah felt that she had no alternative but to separate herself from the relationship and focus on her personal wellbeing. Sarah noted that

Andrew's unwillingness to abandon the extramarital affairs threatened her physical and mental wellbeing. Andrew was not willing to make restitution for the pain and hurt that he caused, nor was he willing to work to reestablish trust and confidence in the relationship.

Restitution

Restitution carries the idea of a payback in making amends for the loss that the relationship has suffered. Trust has to be rebuilt, which requires honesty, openness and transparency. The rebuilding of trust in any relationship requires efforts by both individuals. In making restitution, the offended has to extend forgiveness in exchange for the satisfaction that derives from punitive consequences; and the offender, beyond repentance, needs to live in such a manner as to remove suspicion and encourage an atmosphere of confidence. The offender has to abstain from all appearance of evil and hold fast to that which is good (1 Thessalonians 5:21-22). Restitution is the payback that is borne out of the gratitude of a forgiven life. Restitution makes reconciliation possible by demonstrating the desire to contribute to an amicable outcome.

Reconciliation

Reconciliation is the redemptive outcome of a disciplined life. A life that has been transformed and determined to live committed to love. It is the recommitment of lives to the joint venture of mutual engagement. The merging of two lives into one. A oneness in mutual gratification as each individual contributes to the wellbeing of the other. Reconciliation also requires honesty, openness and transparency.

Honesty is the congruence in life evidenced by behavior that is an authentic and a true expression of one's character. In order to accomplish such congruence, one needs to experience a character change that replicates goodly virtues and a lifestyle that is expressive of those virtues. Honesty implies authenticity that is a genuine expression of an innate characteristic. That

characteristic in itself must be socially acceptable and individually applicable. Honesty must also incorporate qualities that are both spiritually and socially approved yet applicable to the individual that it engages. Honesty presupposes an attitudinal transformation out of which actions representing authenticity and congruence flow. It is this state of honesty that becomes the corner stone for the rebuilding of trust. This honesty is the outcome of a repentant life; a conversion that substitutes evil for good, wrong for right, brokenness for wholeness, indifference for love. Repentance is foundational to rebuilding trust and establishing the platform for honest living. It is this honesty that sets in motion an acquaintance to the authentic self that is genuinely expressed. Honest living facilitates openness; a welcoming invitation to enter the world of another.

In order to restore the relationship, Andrew needed to be honest in admitting both his misdeeds and the desire to make amends by a changed behavior. Andrew was unwilling to admit or confess his wrongdoing and the projection of misplaced blame made the effort at reconciliation unattainable. His unrepentant life placed a wedge at the attempt to seek consensus on a consequent compromise to amend the relationship. His hidden secrets of persistent infidelity left him guarded and unresponsive with no attempt at repentance. Without being honest, he was unwilling to be open as to invite Sarah into his private world of experiences and shared exploration. It is said that “love must be without hypocrisy, abhor what is evil; cling to what is good” (Romans 12:9 NET).

An examined life is as open as it is honest. Openness extends welcome to shared life experiences. Shared life experiences serve to nurture and build intimacy. It is an intimacy that goes beyond mere acquaintance to expressed attributes to the point of an association enriched by shared experiences. As two authentic selves merge in shared fellowship, they develop a symbiotic relationship of mutual satisfaction. This openness invites exploration of shared meaning, values and feelings that are often repressed and hidden from consciousness. This shared exploration

leaves one vulnerable. However, having established the virtue of honesty, each experience provides opportunity for growth and development. Honesty instills openness with the valor to be vulnerable and the courage to transform moments of discomfort into opportunity for change. Openness allows another the privilege to enter into the privacy of one's world. Honesty, forged out of repentance, provides the basis for a transformed and reconstructed life that makes openness a fearless encounter. There is no fear in love then, as where openness is forged out of honesty that is built upon repentance, perfect love dismisses fear (1 John 4:9). Love is more concerned about redemption than it is about condemnation; more intent on reconciliation than it is on separation (John 3:17). Having then the intent of an open invitation to shared experiences and shared exploration, with the goal of facilitating endearing intimacy transparency, complements both openness and honesty.

Without repenting Andrew would not allow any access into his life's activities. Andrew would not allow Sarah into his private world of affairs nor would he submit to reconstructing a redeeming life inclusive of repentance. His unrepentant state would not allow for shared experiences and shared exploration.

Where honesty and openness are evident, transparency validates life expressions. Transparency must be evidence-based where words become tokens of value that are validated by behavior. With shared and endearing intimacy being the objective, transparency acts as a safeguard to ensure that behavior remains consistent with the relationship goals and objectives. One of the mandates of scripture is to abide in love (John 15:10). It carries the notion of being intentional about living a life that replicates the virtues and characteristics of love. In that vein therefore, when life replicates love's virtues, transparency augments intimacy. Increased intimacy intensifies interactions and strengthens the bond of relationships. Transparency is a method of

non-verbal communication as life becomes an open book that is read by the observing partner. Transparency is necessary for rebuilding trust. Through transparency, one provides access to life's experiences where values are validated, and virtues are embraced. The consistency of a redeemed and restored lifestyle makes trusting a reality. Reconciliation requires transparency in order to affirm faithfulness and truthfulness.

Love must be disciplined. It disapproves any ideology or behavior that is counterproductive to its goals and objectives of wholesome relationship. It is pure in its practice requiring such purity of all its participants. Love unites persons into endearing relationship and the fellowship of such relationship flourishes to the extent that the individuals remain consistent in embracing its values and virtues. When love's goals and objectives are subverted, the relationship becomes strained and the fellowship is broken by the introduction of opposing undertakings. This estrangement creates a distancing and disassociation that may eventually culminate in divorce. Repentance is essential to avoid divorce. Repentance is a discipline that carries the expectation of restitution and reconciliation. An attempt at reconciliation require truthfulness and rebuilding of trust. Honesty, openness and transparency are necessary virtues in rebuilding trust and reconstructing redemptive relationships.

Andrew's stubborn resistance and arrogant entitlement and failure to pursue the path of repentance, with the necessary disciplines, made it difficult for Sarah to consider reconciliation. Andrew's unwillingness only served to further distant himself from her and that dissociation ultimately ended in divorce.

Love must be selective. Love must be selective in that when love is informed and educated, love is faced with choices. These choices define love's determined output, ongoing commitment, and desired outcome. Love makes choices regarding its output as every expression, whether in

words or action, needs to contribute to its desired outcome. Love requires that its activities be internally consistent and mutually supportive to its end goal. Engaging things that are counterproductive to its purpose frustrates its process and retards its progress.

Variables, such as gender, ethnicity, race, personality types, age, nationality, creed, orientation, religion add to the complexity in the act of loving. When confronted with these variables, the lover must consider the quest of loving. It is not so much as to whether the lover has the ability to love, but whether the lover has the capacity to live with such variables. Each of these variables is peculiar to each individual and in relationship could be as complementary, as well as conflictual. When the conflict is caused by loving someone whose variables are counterproductive rather than complementary, love needs to consider the expected sacrifice and has to be selective in its choices. However, compatibility is not determined by the similarities of the variables but rather by the ability to harmonize the differences towards the desired outcome.

Both likeness and difference are causes for concerns in human relationship. As much as opposites attract, they also have the tendency to frustrate. Even likeness is not exempted from the frustration of monotony. Love must be selective as it chooses complementary variables and must also be selective in adopting the characteristics and qualities that it seeks to emulate.

Love must be subservient. Being subservient has the idea of being submissive, compliant, passive, and obedient and carries the notion of servanthood. Love must be subservient, and as servitude requires the utmost sacrifice, servanthood must be a choice. Love cannot be legislated and cannot be forced. Forced love is improbable. However, when love is evident it commits to serve the best interest of the object being loved.

To be subservient is to be a student of the object of one's love. It is to allow the object being loved to be the primary source of information regarding its needs, and in some sense to be

the expert on his/her own life experiences. Expectations are often the seedbed of disappointments. If expectations are not grounded in the ability of the one loving to give love, and the capacity of the one being loved to receive love, then the effort remains frustrated and in constant struggle. Love is subservient as love seeks to be informed by the beloved's capacity to receive love while at the same time the one being loved takes into consideration the lover's ability to love. The subservient love is informed by humility – it does not boast in the pride of its betterment, but has the willingness to be impacted by another less fortunate than itself. Subservient love is also informed by meekness – it is dependent on the power of a relationship to perpetuate its existence. Love reigns as love rules each act of the desired relationship and as such love never fails (1 Corinthians 13).

It can also be argued that love surrenders only to itself. Even in the act of sacrifice, it has wisely been said that “if I give my body to be burnt and have not love it profits me nothing” (1Corinthians 13:3). Love must be subservient to be successful for by being the servant to anything good, love becomes the master of everything. Love outflows in one direction but operates on three dimensions: upward to loving God, inward in loving self, and outward in loving others.

Love is a successful enterprise as it often reproduces itself as it fulfills its desired outcome. All human beings want to succeed. Successful loving must be viewed, assessed and evaluated from the three dimensions of the human existence: the inward, outward and upward dimensions. These three are exemplified existentially in loving God, loving self and loving others.

In the words of Kierkegaard (1962), “one cannot cease to be loving; if one in truth is loving he continues to do so. If one ceases to be loving, then one was never loving anyway” (p.282). Love never fails – it is the greatest of all for it is God expressing Himself. Within the human heart, it is the experience of God in all God's attributes. As act, love is a divine expression manifesting itself

through the human vessel, with optimal ability and fullest capacity, seeking the best interest of the object loved.

Love cannot be forced nor legislated, but love becomes a law unto itself, transcending as it transforms. Love is a social enterprise. Contextualized within interpersonal relationships, love is as personal as it is social. It can only be experienced and expressed as an existential reality. Love is the by-product of a meaningful life and an essential component to successful living. Love cannot be fabricated or forged. However, sometimes it is misunderstood and misrepresented. Love is directionally outflowing – one-direction; yet having three dimensions as degrees of expressions. When incarnated love embodies itself within human flesh, its attempt to reconcile humanity to divinity. Love invites reciprocity, vicarious sacrifices, and salvific support – the former expressed as prevenient grace and the latter as the gift of life. Love engages God, self, and others. Within this scope of its operation, it is divine, and it is also human. It is as pure as it is divine, yet as unadulterated to the extent that it is human. Love is unconditional commitment.

Intervention: encouraging self-determination to foster self-efficacy.

To learn, to love and to live are three aspects of the human growth experience. Sarah continued therapy through another counselor to learn more about herself and develop coping skills to regain her confidence and self-esteem. She remained committed to live beyond the separation and care for her son who was finishing middle school. Her son remains one of the motivating factors in her desire to live well beyond her hurt. She has acknowledged difficulty loving again but recognized her need for healing and the rebuilding of trust. She was aware that the knowledge of her past would always play a role in influencing her future choices. Sarah was also cognizant of the need to focus on her goals and objectives while using the lessons of her past experiences to intelligently inform her. She could speak of Andrew without returning to the negative affect and

thoughts that once flooded her mind. She remained positive of loving again but was cautious about finding the suitable person.

Two books were handed out to Andrew and Sarah to read for further discussion. Andrew was given *Chase the Lion* by Mark Batterson (2016). Sarah was given *Successful Women Think Differently* by Valorie Burton (2012). The intent was to have each read for subsequent discussion geared towards self-determination and efficacious living. Both books have been proven to be instrumental in enriching lives, refining purpose and enhancing self-actualization. Everyone was asked to review each chapter and work on implementing the necessary principles on a weekly basis. This process was followed by seven weekly conversations where chapters were discussed, and the possible applications and challenges were determined. Sarah followed consistently. However, Andrew did not complete the follow-up discussions. An unexpected meeting with Andrew did not reveal much. He stated he was doing well though no details were given.

Case Summary

It is normally expected that the indication of the success of marriage counseling is reconciliation with remedial outcomes. The idea of ultimate separation appears to be a failure in the mind of the counselor. The mental and emotional health of any individual is an essential component of a successful relationship. In the light of numerous individuals facing second and third attempts at marriage, issues of conflict must be noted and addressed. However, the idea of successful living beyond separation is necessary, especially where children are involved, and parents are continuing contributors to their wellbeing.

To have both Andrew and Sarah live healthy lives beyond separation and collaborate independently to raise the children successfully is, to an extent, redemptive and reconciliatory. The process is ongoing. Both Sarah and Andrew remain divorced and neither has sought to be remarried at this time. Towards the end, only Sarah remained in therapy. She was led to generate a profile of the man she wished to engage with the knowledge of her non-negotiables. She was mindful of the need to recover from the hurt and loss of the former relationship and was assisted in developing the knowledge to take her through the healing process. Sarah was led to develop the courage to release herself from the mental and emotional captivity of the past and focus on the present reality in light of her goals and objectives of healthy living beyond separation. Sarah was resilient in her ability to cope and found meaning in forging a caring relationship with her son, though it became even more challenging. The older children continued to live independently while the youngest child resided with Sarah. The younger sibling was engaged in counseling to develop coping skills and build self-esteem. He chose to visit his father no longer. Sarah continued to attend a church where she socialized and received additional support. She has a significant

supportive, non-romantic female friend. She has the interest of men but reportedly has not responded to any.

Love is redemptive: an art to be learned and lived with the consciousness of a divine encounter that informed and inspires each act. Love flows externally, being internally sourced through an interactive relationship with God. It is sacrificial as it is supportive and is redemptive and reconstructive. Love is divine, and to the human mind it is an art that needs to be informed, inspired, incarnated and its principles mastered within the context of daily living. Love reconstructs redemptive relationships as an unconditional commitment, fully devoted to the wellbeing of another.

The following scripture was given to serve as a spiritual and moral focal point to address the issues of forgiveness and future experiences of unconditional commitment that is both sacrificial and supportive: one-directional in expression, and loving God, self, and others.

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

Love is patient and kind; love is not jealous or boastful; it is not arrogant or rude. Love does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrong, but rejoices in the right. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Love never ends; as for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For our knowledge is imperfect and our prophecy is imperfect; but when the perfect comes, the imperfect will pass away. When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child; when I became a man, I gave up childish ways. For now, we see in a mirror dimly, but then face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall understand fully, even as I have been fully understood. So, faith, hope, love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

(1 Corinthians 13, Revised Standard Version)

Appendix A

Contract for Couples In Counseling

Issues of confidentiality

1. It is understood that all information shared within each session will be kept confidential
2. Notes taken during sessions are intended to be used to aid in assessing progress and will be kept in a secured location
3. Confidentiality will not be binding when information referencing serious harm to self or others is disclosed. This also includes cruelty to minors, the elderly and animals.

Insistence of Contract

(Developed during the first session identifying clients' needs and counselor's expectations)

1. First session will require an assessment of the relationship with focus on the presented scenario and the projection of a preferred scenario.
2. Sessions will be held weekly, with each session being 50 minutes. Clients agree to commit initially to at least 6 sessions. Agree to begin on time, finish on time.
3. It is understood that Christian values and scriptural principles will be utilized to inform discussions and possible outcomes.
4. Any conversation between sessions with either party relating to information shared during sessions will be disclosed and discussed at the next session.
5. All parties agree to be cordial to each other, making every effort to allow fair presentations of opinions without undue interruption. Each will be giving reasonable time to speak.
6. Allowance will be made for individual sessions only if agreed upon by both parties with the intent of developing personal application of relationship principles. Equal time for each will be allotted.
7. It is expected that both parties work diligently to address noted issues and effect the necessary changes.
8. In the event of uncontrolled emotional outburst, both parties are expected to be tolerant and considerate to allow space to work through the process of managing the behavior.
9. Openness and honesty are expected. Responses to disclosures will be monitored and managed.
10. Goals and objectives will be noted, and attempts will be made to achieve them.
11. In the event of separation, or beyond the 6 weeks initial sessions, referral will be made if necessary and when requested.
12. In the event of any separation or court proceedings, parties agree not to request that counselor be subpoenaed to testify against either party.

Signature _____

Date _____

Signature _____

Date _____

Counselor _____

Date _____

Appendix B

Cost Benefit Analysis

Considering the Pro's and Con's

Advantage and disadvantage of our relationship as it is or of possibly changing our relationship to what it can potentially become.

Present Scenario _____ Preferred Scenario _____

Our Relationship Now

Plus

Minus

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Our Relationship at its Best

Plus

Minus

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.

Created by Victor A. Price, MSW; LCSW

Appendix C

Letter of Forgiveness

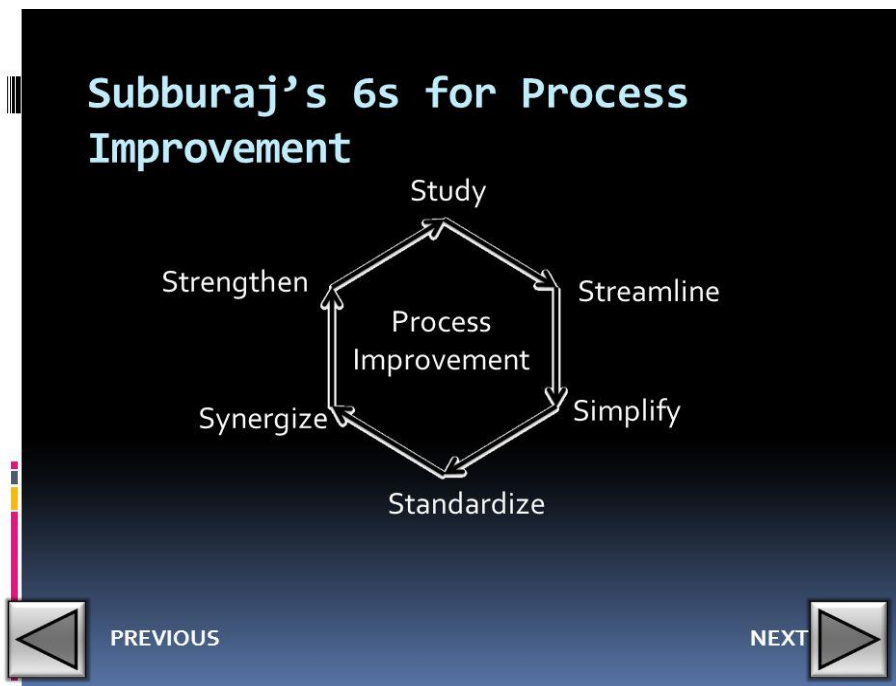
Dear

This letter serves to address the issues of our differences and the hurt that I have caused you. I know that I am not perfect, and my actions and words may at times have caused you some pain. For this, I ask for your forgiveness and to release you from any thought of harm or hurt that you may have caused me.

It is my intent to do my best to be a better person, a better parent and continue to contribute to the wellbeing of our children.

Sincerely,

Appendix D



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VITA

Dr. Victor A. Price is an adjunct professor at Caribbean Nazarene College and Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in the Masters in Counseling Programs. He is a Pastor, Mental Health Counselor, Licensed Clinical Social Worker, Community Organizer, and a retired Child Protective Investigator of the Department of Children and Families in the state of Massachusetts, USA. He is also a Certified Cultural Intelligence facilitator.

Dr. Price is the founder of “Maximizing Manhood” and “Loving Without Limits” conducting psychoeducational therapeutic groups sessions for men and facilitating Couples’ Retreats. He is the founder and academic coordinator of “Clinical Network Conference” addressing mental health concerns both in the Caribbean and the United States. He is also the founder of “East Course Holiness Summit” providing a forum for spiritual and social action.

Having graduated from Caribbean Nazarene Theological College with a Minister’s Diploma in 1981, at Eastern Nazarene College he graduated with a Masters in Religion in 1992. In 1994 he graduated from Boston University with a Master’s Degree in Sacred Theology and in the year 2000 earned a Post Graduate Certificate in Child and Adolescent Psychotherapy. In May 2002 he earned a Doctor of Ministry Degree at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary with the emphasis on Spiritual Renewal. In May 2004 Dr. Price graduated from Simmons College with a Masters in Social Work degree and a Certificate in Urban Leadership in Clinical Social Work. In 2013 an honorary Doctor of Divinity was conferred upon him by Caribbean Nazarene College. Presently he is a candidate for the Doctor of Ministry in Marriage and Family Therapy. Dr. Price is the father of two sons Shane and Shaun and the husband of Ayana.